Augustan Age, one can see that the Romans had found themselves again, after two centuries of political and cultural upheaval. They had changed considerably from their forebears of third-century Rome. The conquest of the Mediterranean led first to a collapse of the old Republic and then to the evolution of a new machinery under an almost absolute ruler, which we shall soon inspect. The old Roman simplicity gave way to a much more complicated civilization in which Greek culture was fully accepted and integrated. “Rome” no longer meant a dominant city-state but all Italy under Augustus; the next step was to make “Rome” equal the entire Mediterranean.

The Augustan Age thus marks the final achievement of a cultural synthesis between Greece and Rome and the establishment of a stable political system which would safeguard the working out of that synthesis in a truly Mediterranean civilization and its expansion throughout the Empire. And, in closing this chapter, it might be well to note that the Greeks on their side had by now grown ready to accept Roman rule. For a Rome conscious of its mission and an empire reconciled to its domination the future looked bright toward a peaceful expansion and intensification of civilization.
CHAPTER V

The Synthesis of the Empire

THE new era of Roman history which begins with Augustus is usually called the Empire, and the series of individuals who controlled the state after Augustus forms the famous line of Roman emperors. Though the Empire has a long history running down into the fifth century after Christ, we shall be concerned here only with the period from Augustus to A.D. 180—the two centuries which witnessed the ever more complete synthesis of Mediterranean civilization and its spread through much of Europe. This epoch is one of the great consolidating periods of world history, in which the contributions of Orient, Greece, and Rome were summed up and passed on to later civilization.

These two centuries of uninterrupted tranquillity are perhaps the longest period during which the civilized world has known peace and felt a sense of security. They were gained for the Roman Empire by the Augustan reorganization of the ramshackle, haphazard structure of government built up in the Republic, for the Augustan system lasted without major outward change down to A.D. 180. The nature of the civilization fostered by the famous “Roman peace” we shall examine later, but first let us cast a brief glance at the Empire itself.
The Constitution of the Empire

In one light Augustus is one of the most coldly calculating and consciously opportunist politicians of all time; yet rarely have the conscious and unconscious drives of man been so intertwined and difficult to determine. Though the system of government he established was essentially that of one-man rule, it was not an outright autocracy of Oriental or even Hellenistic character. Augustus had learned too much from Caesar's fate to make that mistake, but he was also a true Roman who sensed the strengths of the Roman character as reflected in its political institutions. In his fight against Sextus Pompey and Antony he had won upon a program of restoring peace and order, but he had also stressed the restoration of the old system of government and the reinvigoration of traditional Roman moral and religious customs. In part this program was designed simply to gain support; in part it reflected his own views about the nature of Roman society. In 27 B.C. he formally restored the Republic, so ending the era of revolution and illegality, and thenceforth he accepted the principle that the fount of all power was the people. Consuls, tribunes, and other magistrates were elected year by year, as in the old days, for centuries to come. In one sense, then, it is not correct to use the terms "empire" and "emperor" to describe the Augustan system and its director, for the republican machinery technically continued. Though hereditary succession was actually common in this system, each ruler received his collection of purely legal powers anew from the Roman people, and his position might be compared to that of Mussolini or Stalin in modern times. It might be better to give Augustus the title he himself used, "first citizen" (princeps), and to call his system the
Principate; but accuracy must yield here, as so often, to custom.

To those Romans who were born in the days of Cicero and became adults under Augustus the new system was intended to mask absolute power with a constitutional guise. In appearance it was a delicate balance between two elements, the princeps and the Senate. The Senate's very genuine and far-reaching powers arose partly from a desire to appease the aristocracy, partly from the effort of Augustus to divide up the great task of running the Mediterranean world, partly again from his wish to tap the sources of strength in the old Republic. The Senate thus retained outward control of finances, though the treasury was often dependent on the ruler's private means, which were already great and steadily grew thereafter. The Senate governed Italy, which Augustus stressed as the dominant region in the Empire. It split the provinces with the princeps, the Senate taking the more peaceful areas. It began to absorb powers of legislation and justice which later led to the practical abolition of the assemblies.

The princeps had sufficient legal powers to check and control any other part of the machinery; he also controlled the armed forces; but in addition his position rested on his auctoritas or "authority," a supralegal power arising first from general respect for Augustus' achievements and then in later reigns from the feeling that the princeps bound together the Roman Empire. Through his own deft policy Augustus successfully enlisted the aid of all elements of Roman society and bound them to his regime. To gain preferment or even to be admitted legally to their particular class the young nobles and equestrians were forced to turn to the princeps; though class distinctions were steadily
sharpened, Augustus opened the way for many men of the Italian middle classes, like his friend Agrippa, to rise to high posts. A biting critic, such as the historian Tacitus, might well call this situation "slavery" and moan over the disappearance of liberty, but only through support of the ruler could the ambitious rise to honors.

The old republican offices were reserved in the main for the senatorial families; the higher military and provincial posts went to senators and equestrians, who were now paid. Since they were more carefully supervised than in the Republic, government in the provinces thenceforth was on a fairly respectable level. Much of the Empire worshiped Augustus as a present divinity, an earthly savior and protector; this cult of the emperors rapidly became a formal means of binding the subjects together in patriotic reverence and was later to cause the Christians serious trouble.

In addition to improving the supervision of officials outside Rome Augustus also removed another shortcoming of the republican system by enlarging the central administration. The root of this new, ever-growing imperial bureaucracy goes back to the household servants of a great noble; for when Augustus, as such a noble, became virtual ruler, he used his slaves and freedmen to advise him, to watch over affairs, and particularly to supervise financial matters. The imperial bureaucracy thus arose out of much the same background as the civil service of modern European states, which can in turn be traced back to the households of late medieval monarchs. Since the bureaucracy was not bound by republican precedents, it could be altered to suit conditions and grew rapidly into an efficient system for aiding later rulers in many ways.

Augustus was not content merely with reforms of govern-
ment, for to his troubled Roman eyes the chaos of the past century stemmed largely from religious and moral decay. To bring back true life to the Graeco-Roman religion was beyond the powers of any ruler, but Augustus did at least revive its cults, repair its temples, and keep it going for the next two centuries. His laws discouraging adultery and over-lavishness in meals or promoting childbearing were bitterly opposed, yet were pushed with iron determination. In the end these efforts at moral reform, among the most ambitious ever tried by any western ruler, failed, and Augustus’ own daughter had to be banished for adultery.

During the forty-one years of his rule as princeps (27 B.C.—A.D. 14) Augustus established the general tone of the Principate as a truly Roman institution, practically conceived to meet practical needs. His house on the Palatine was more ornate than that of an ordinary aristocrat, but his doors were open to all. The ceremony of an Oriental court crept very slowly into Rome, for even 150 years after the death of Augustus we have the description of a princeps riding unescorted across the countryside on vacation, helping in the grape harvest, and acting generally as a private citizen rather than as a monarch. Nevertheless the powers of this “first citizen” were very great, resting as they did on armed force, legal position, and even deification outside Italy; and the limits of his actions depended more upon the balance between whim and sense of duty than upon genuine curbs from without.

Throughout the years the powers of the emperor tended constantly to increase in scope and intensity. This absorption of power was only rarely planned by the ruler; more generally it was forced upon him. The princeps was efficient and had a good staff—that was the situation in a nutshell; accord-
ingly people turned to him to get things done. The result was the steady though accidental loss of power by the Senate, by the local units of government (the cities), and by individuals, who became more and more subject to state interference. Yet, though the state loomed ever larger, down to A.D. 180 something of the feeling that the individual had a value—one of the great achievements of Mediterranean civilization—was preserved.

The Development of the Empire

When Augustus died peacefully in Campania, his disappointed, aging stepson Tiberius (reg. A.D. 14–37) succeeded him without difficulty and was granted for life the powers Augustus had held. Therewith was inaugurated the series of Roman emperors which, embracing as it does mad Caligula (37–41), pedantic yet industrious Claudius (41–54), dilet-tantish Nero (54–68), gloomy Domitian (81–96), and philosophic Marcus Aurelius (161–180), has ever since captured the imagination of men. The kaleidoscopic picture of the emperors and their scarcely less absorbing wives and mistresses must be passed over here, and in any event the emperors are less important as individuals than as successive units in a steadily developing system of government.

Down to the suicide of Nero in 68 the rulers belonged to the Augustan family complex; then came a year of anarchy in which the frontier armies fought with each other to elevate their commanders to imperial power. The winner, Vespasian (69–79), followed in Augustus’ footsteps by restoring order and putting the armies back under control. After the murder of his second son Domitian in 96 came the series of “Good Emperors” of the second century; down to Marcus Aurelius each was childless and so chose by adop-
tion the most eligible senator to succeed him. All paid due respect to the Senate, unlike such bloodthirsty, suspicious rulers as Nero and Domitian in the first century, though actually the Senate became ever more a sounding board for imperial wishes. These emperors of the second century derived from provincial stock and admitted large elements of the provincial aristocracy into the Senate, there to sit beside the best blood of Italy and so represent the Empire as a whole. While the first century was one of friction between emperor and Senate, the second century was a tranquil age.

By the reign of Hadrian (117–138), which perhaps marks the height of the Roman Empire, the imperial system of government had become a complicated, extensive structure befitting the size of the Empire. In theory the ordinary tasks of government were still divided between the emperor and the Senate, but the functions of the latter became steadily more formal. The Senate now elected the consuls and other officials, it passed legislation, it was still responsible for Rome, Italy, and certain provinces. In Rome, however, the heads of the city police and fire brigades, the administrator of the food supply, and even the city governor were appointed by the princeps. Italy retained a favored position in that it was free from taxes and conscription; it also furnished half the Senate; but it was for ordinary purposes of administration treated more and more like any other area of the Empire. Under Hadrian the great secretaryships of the central administration, formerly held by freedmen, were handed over to equestrians, who tended to become ever more specialized public servants, some in the armed forces, others in the civil administration. By this time tax farming was largely abolished, and a number of separate financial services collected the inheritance tax on Roman citizens, the manumission tax
on freed slaves, the regular taxes, the rents from imperial property, and so on. The funds flowed to the imperial or old senatorial treasuries, but both were directly under the princeps' control.

**Roman Law**

The increasing power of the princeps is reflected also in the development of Roman law. Roman law is one of the greatest Roman contributions to western civilization, but to go beyond the flat statement into an analysis of what that law was and why it was so significant leads at once into a tangle of complexities. Briefly, the law built up by the Romans after the Twelve Tables (about 443–442 B.C.) may be said to meet Dean Pound's requirement that "law must be stable and yet it cannot stand still." Roman law was conservative and so furnished a stable base for business operations, yet it did undergo tremendous changes as Rome grew. The annexation of the empire, beginning before 200 B.C., rendered the old system based directly on the Twelve Tables inadequate, but under the leadership of the praetors the Roman lawyers gradually hammered out an improved system which would meet the greater complications of their more civilized life and wider rule. In this gradual process the practical, instinctive bent of the Romans played the largest part, but the lawyers were also influenced in part by Greek rhetoric, which was prominent in their education, and to a lesser degree by Greek philosophy, which occasionally suggested underlying principles. But in the main Roman law was an empirical law, grounded upon actual cases and events; in this respect its development paralleled that of English common law.

Each year the praetor issued his "edict," based upon the
edict of the previous year; in this document he announced what remedies he would entertain for causes at law. In the reign of Hadrian the famous praetor Salvius Julianus codified this praetor's edict, so that it was no longer subject to change. Legislation by the assemblies, which had always been minor, had likewise ceased; but one safety valve for change remained in the form of the princeps' power of issuing decrees with the essential force of law. One cannot yet quite say that the will of the ruler was law, but that day was coming. Already the rulers were having a powerful effect on the law, bending it in ever more humanitarian ways so as to protect the weak, the orphans, and the slaves.

The Armed Forces

Throughout the first two centuries of the Empire the internal development of the government and the general prosperity of the people were protected by the armed forces of the princeps. Augustus had made the army and navy permanent and had organized them so successfully that subsequent rulers made few changes in his basic principles. The army consisted of legions of solid infantry, composed of Roman citizens; and the auxiliaries, light foot and horse recruited from non-Romans who were given Roman citizenship upon discharge. Service was long-term, running up to twenty-six years for the auxiliaries, so that an army career was a lifetime profession; local militia and arms bearing were as a rule not encouraged by the rulers. Apart from the relatively small praetorian guard to protect the ruler in Rome the army itself was placed on the frontier. This policy assured immediate protection of the boundary provinces, but if once an enemy broke through the frontiers he had a clear field until troops could hastily be brought up from another
less threatened frontier. Fortunately the Empire enjoyed interior lines of communication and was not seriously threatened on several points at once during the first two centuries. In any event it probably could not have afforded a standing army much in excess of the roughly 300,000 to 500,000 men required to guard the frontiers.

Roman fleets helped police the frontiers in Europe, which rested on the Rhine and Danube. Other, larger fleets served in the Mediterranean, based primarily on Italian ports. During the first two centuries of the Empire the Roman fleets did not fight a single major battle, so complete was their control; piracy almost ceased to exist, for the only time in history down to the nineteenth century. The Romans never esteemed the navy as highly as the army, but Augustus and his successors must be given credit for realizing that the Empire was based upon the Mediterranean. Only through control of its waters could an area larger in point of relative time than all the world today be held together under one system of government.

The Roman armed forces were remarkably successful down through A.D. 180 in protecting the frontier. Augustus himself used the army to conquer most of the Balkans and to rectify the frontier elsewhere, but he gave up an intended conquest of Germany after a great disaster east of the Rhine. In his advice to his successors he urged that the frontiers be kept as they were on his death. The conquest of all Germany, which might have had tremendous effects in later history, was never again tried, but later rulers added most of Britain, southwest Germany, and the modern Roumania (Dacia). After the conquest of this last region under Trajan (98-117), who delighted in war, his successor Hadrian gave over the offensive and began to stress retention of what the Empire
already held. A stone wall was built entirely across Britain to keep out the Picts, and by the middle of the second century the Roman world was encased in an armor of stone or wooden walls or frontier roads which were garrisoned at intervals and patrolled.

**Pax Romana**

As one looks back over the reorganization carried out by Augustus and strengthened by the following rulers, its general success and evident soundness of basic principles are amazing. The army, the navy, provincial government, the central bureaucracy, the Senate, and the *princeps*—all combined to produce a lasting peace for the Empire. The “limitless majesty of the Roman peace” is indeed a remarkable accomplishment in history. It cannot be said that this peace was deeply appreciated by the Roman aristocracy after the time of Augustus, for they now had lost their opportunities for loot and personal power. The upper and middle classes of the provinces, however, were very enthusiastic and revealed their enthusiasm through hosts of statues and inscriptions set up in honor of the rulers who guaranteed the peace. One of the great triumphs of nineteenth-century historiography was the collection of these inscriptions and the extraction from them of the tremendous amount of information they contain about general conditions in the Roman Empire.

The inscriptions, however, will not entirely answer a vital question which we must now consider: granted that the Empire accepted the *princeps* and so had its peace, what was the real content of that peace? Was it employed to advance civilization to unheard-of heights? And in getting
their peace did the men of that period give up anything worth the keeping?

**Seneca**

The greatest figure in the pagan intellectual history of the Empire is Seneca the Younger (L. Annaeus Seneca, c. 5 b.c.–A.D. 65), whose life and thought both throw a bright light upon the main trends of the period. Few philosophers have had such a chance to direct the politics of their day, for Seneca was both a Stoic philosopher and a member of the highest circles of the imperial aristocracy. Under Claudius he was exiled, and unfortunately for his reputation we have his frantic, bootlicking appeal to one of Claudius’ freedmen for restoration to favor; eventually he was recalled by Nero’s mother Agrippina, the last wife of Claudius, as tutor for her son. When Claudius died after eating the famous dish of poisoned mushrooms prepared by his wife, Seneca passed from tutor of Nero to chief minister of the whole Empire together with Burrus, commander of Nero’s praetorian bodyguard. The period down to 62 in which Seneca and Burrus really ran the state was afterwards remembered as the best part of Nero’s reign. Eventually Seneca lost his power and retired. The tremendous wealth which he had accumulated, together with his past position, made him an object of suspicion to Nero, and Seneca’s last years were uneasy. In A.D. 65 he and his nephew, the brilliant young poet Lucan, were both forced to commit suicide.

Seneca was more than a senator, a figure of state, or a millionaire. He was also a philosopher of unquestionable sincerity and ability of mind; yet more, he was a masterful essayist with a rushing, choppy, tricky style, a dramatist
of repute, an expert in natural science of the period—in short, the most rounded figure of the Empire. If anyone could throw light on the meaning and problems of the Empire, Seneca, both the thinker and the doer, should be that person. At times in his *Moral Essays* as well as in his *Letters* he struck notes of real moral grandeur; at other points he engaged in the most stale rehash of Stoic doctrine; but always he considered directly the ethical problems of the noble class to which he primarily addressed himself.

The inner uncertainty which he reveals for that class, and the resulting worship of Fortune, were in part the result of man's inherent insecurity, but even more it arose from the nature of the Empire. Seneca knew the Principate at first hand. He accepted it and could deliver a strong Stoic argument that kingship was the best form of government (if the king were good):

[The emperor] is the bond by which the commonwealth is united, the breath of life which these many thousands draw, who in their own strength would be only a burden to themselves and the prey of others if the great mind of the empire should be withdrawn. . . . Such a calamity would be the destruction of the Roman peace, such a calamity will force the fortune of a mighty people to its downfall. Just so long will this people be free from that danger as it shall know how to submit to the rein; but if ever it shall tear away the rein, or shall not suffer it to be replaced if shaken loose by some mishap, then this unity and this fabric of mightiest empire will fly into many parts.

Yet the man who had so deep an appreciation of the need for a *princeps* was frequently fearful of the unchecked liberty of action which the ruler enjoyed. To Seneca the Empire was, in the end, a reign of force; all he could do was to hope to bend his young charge, Nero, toward virtue.
With this aim in view he prepared a powerful essay *On Clemency*, whose exhortations to virtue, mildness, and justice he pretended were but a mirror of Nero’s own self; but any reader can detect Seneca’s real fear as to Nero’s characteristics.

Seneca’s line of thought is typical of philosophical thinking in the Empire: it is conventional, eclectic, and flat; yet it continues to possess the Roman practicality. In the *Letters to Lucilius*, composed after his retirement, he had become urgent and imbued with prophetic feeling that a man must withdraw from public activity if he were to secure his own true ends in life; liberty was an internal, not an external, political matter under the Caesars. Such was the end of a life of outward glory and wealth! Seneca is often accused of hypocrisy in being fabulously wealthy and yet preaching against the evils of wealth; but Seneca, if any man, could appreciate directly the dangers and troubles of money. The philosophic disdain for this world’s goods is coupled with an admission that one of the great aims of life for his contemporaries was wealth:

the whole nation, though at odds on every other subject, agrees upon this [money]; this is what they regard, this is what they ask for their children, this is what they dedicate to the gods when they wish to show their gratitude—as if it were the greatest of all man’s possessions!

In this accusation of materialism he strikes a common note of imperial thinking, to which we shall return.

An outstanding aspect of Seneca’s thought is his humanitarianism. Among the principal amusements in imperial Rome were the “games,” in which animals were pitted against each other, animals against men, or men against men
with a good deal of bloodshed and violent death. The public liked the games, which were lavishly provided by the rulers; one satirist coined the phrase “bread and games” to epitomize the policy by which the emperors kept the city populace content and apathetic. Seneca, however, was bitingly opposed to the games where even in the intermissions “men were strangled lest people be bored.” Again, he was deeply sympathetic with slaves, for Seneca was as devout as any Christian in believing that each man had a spark of the divine within him:

God is near you, he is with you, he is within you. This is what I mean, Lucilius, a holy spirit indwells within us, one who marks our good and bad deeds, and is our guardian. . . . No man can be good without the help of God.

As Christians of later ages read their Seneca, they were struck by the extent to which he apparently echoed Christian ideas, and it was an easy step in the Middle Ages for people to assume that he had known his contemporary St. Paul and had imbibed his ideas from the missionary of the church; a fictitious collection of letters between the two was even composed and widely circulated. Actually Seneca’s humanitarianism and cosmopolitanism rose directly out of the general currents within the Empire, and if Christianity had the same ideas, the parallelism is merely a reflection of the widespread nature of those ideas. Historically considered, the rise of Christianity is much indebted to the preparation of the ground by pagan thinkers. Christianity, indeed, could offer much more, as the case of Seneca clearly shows. Seneca was a humanitarian, but he was also filled with an underlying pessimism and essential apathy characteristic of pagan philosophers. Bred in the rationalistic school of Graeco-Roman
civilization which tried to strip away the emotions and rely only on the mind, Seneca could not allow himself the emotional appeal of the Christians. To the pagans, life after death either did not exist—a conclusion which many accepted gladly as marking an end to their troubles—or at best it was a very vague affair as in Seneca. The pagans could not picture a nonmaterialistic afterlife. In yet another particular Seneca reflects the weakness of secular thinking in comparison with that of the Christians. Men were indeed to him all members of one great state, the state of Nature under God, but the individualism of the Roman aristocracy affected him to the extent that a true feeling of brotherly love is not very apparent. Seneca wrote a long work *On Benefits*, but it is essentially an analysis of social duties and good turns on a rather cold plane of the material.

*The Culture of the Empire*

Further comparison between the Christians and Seneca would lead us away from the Empire itself, but in summation it may be said that nowhere better than in Seneca can we form an estimate of the intellectual level of the Empire. In accepting the imperial system the inhabitants of the Mediterranean did not accept a system which led to great intellectual advances. The nature of the Principate had some repressive weight at times—some authors, too bold in criticism of individual emperors, paid with their lives for their poetry or prose—but the generally stable, unvaried tenor of life in the Empire together with the lack of political voice of the individual probably had more effect in damping down thought than did sporadic political oppression. There is, in other words, a price which men must pay for stability.

The stirring days of the Republic were over; the synthesis
between Greek and Roman culture had essentially been established by the time of Virgil. The Empire thus was notable mainly for the elaboration of that synthesis and its spread into the uncivilized stretches of Europe conquered by Caesar and Augustus.

Beneath the surface the forces which had led to the rise of Mediterranean civilization were ebbing away. Literary men did not have fresh thoughts; instead they turned, like Seneca, to the past and imitated the earlier writers alike in material, in style, and in vocabulary. This decay of ancient civilization was not necessarily as "bad" as it is usually pictured to be; on the contrary, the ancient had to give way if the medieval and then the modern views of life were to be born. Seneca reveals clearly two very interesting points: that ancient thought could proceed no further within its complex of political, social, and economic institutions, and that new ideas were arising which could not be expressed within that complex. Ancient civilization as such might be losing its creative powers, but mankind as a race had not thereby necessarily lost its freshness of thought and originality of concept.

To complete the picture of intellectual activity in the Empire it must be pointed out that, although learning did not progress upward, it certainly expanded outward and downward. Romanization of the Empire we shall consider in a moment, but even in the ancient seats of learning education became ever more widespread. The house walls of Pompeii near Naples, buried by an eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79, are covered with scribbled remarks of idlers, obscene and otherwise, by election appeals, by scratched lines from Virgil put down by schoolboys. A very great part of the people of this town could read, and the same was true else-
where in the Empire. Libraries appeared all over the provinces as well as in Rome. Some cities were hiring public teachers by the second century after Christ, and the emperors endowed regular chairs at Athens and Rome.

One reflection of this interest in education is a work *On Oratorical Training* by the Spanish rhetorician Quintilian (M. Fabius Quintilianus, c. 35–c. 100). A thorough introduction to the art of speaking, which was vital in ancient civilization, it is also an urbane, balanced appreciation of education generally; the author of this work, which was popular down into the Middle Ages, must rank as one of the most independent thinkers and solid judges of the entire Empire. Though learning in the Empire may have been essentially an elaboration of the Graeco-Roman synthesis, such persons as Quintilian, Seneca, the historian Tacitus, the biographer Plutarch, or the witty critic Lucian are still worth the reading, and the era out of which they grew was the most literate until comparatively recent times in modern Europe.

**Economic Progress**

Both this diffusion of learning and also the manifestation of that humanitarian spirit which marks the Empire rested to a considerable extent upon the great material prosperity of the period. To revert to the question put earlier, one must say that when the Empire accepted the *princeps* and his peace, its principal return was that of physical well-being based on a prosperous economic system. If materialism is enough, then the subjects of the *princeps* had every reason to be happy—down to A.D. 180.

The restoration of peace under Augustus, dubbed "master of land and sea" in grateful inscriptions, gave a great impetus
to Mediterranean commerce and industry, the practitioners of which acclaimed in the princeps the agency through which “they lived, sailed the seas, and enjoyed liberty and prosperity.” In addition to providing peace the emperors built roads, canals, and harbor works, and furnished a good coinage which could inspire business confidence. They also provided a most powerful incentive to trade by their constant expansion of the frontiers in the first century after Christ, for the result was an ever-expanding economy. Imperial encouragement of trade, however, did not in this period extend to imperial control, for the rulers left the business world remarkably free.

The Mediterranean world thus enjoyed those privileges of a tightly knit economic unit which the unrest of the late Republic had interrupted. In general the eastern Mediterranean retained its superiority in industrial skills and provided the more complicated and artistic products, while the western Mediterranean produced raw materials and manufactured items on a lower level of technique. Yet this generalization has its exceptions. Egypt, for instance, provided not only glassware, tricky to make and cherished when obtained, but also great quantities of wheat for Rome. Italy, on the other hand, was a main source of wine for the western Mediterranean, but also captured the market for pottery. To form an accurate picture of commerce and industry one would have to consider the Empire province by province, decade by decade; and the quantity of physical objects left to us by the cities and villas of the period makes such a study almost possible.

Certain main lines of development stand out as the result of the careful research which has been made in this material. It is apparent that the Empire was a hive of industry, whose
products spread across the frontiers far into Europe and Asia. Roman coins are found as far as Sweden, and the nearby Germans were considerably influenced by Roman civilization; although they thereby became a greater danger to the Empire, they also grew more likely to appreciate its culture when eventually they did penetrate its boundaries. Another most interesting development, which has its parallels in modern economy, is the diffusion of industrial techniques so that each province could produce its own wares. Not only did crafts proceed from the more to the less civilized areas; they also tended eventually to move from the cities to the villas of large landowners. Thus in Gaul especially we can see that the large country estates were industrial as well as agricultural complexes and that they sold their wares in nearby cities, to the detriment of the economic fabric of the city. Local production was less expensive, but it did reduce the economic bonds holding the Mediterranean world together; the end was to be the reversion to the local economy of the Middle Ages.

The place of the slave was significant in the early days of the Empire, but it tended steadily to decline as the number of captives in war diminished and piracy was stamped out. In the first century the freedman class was large and significant, and our most brilliant (and bawdy) sketch of life in this period, the Satyricon of Petronius, is at its best in satirizing the rich, gross freedman Trimalchio, who had made his money and was becoming a landed gentleman. In real life the grandson of such a freedman might become a senator, for wealth spoke loudly in the Empire. The presence of slaves and freedmen is less obvious in the second century; on the farms especially the landlords had long since shifted to free men, termed coloni, who rented sections as sharecrop-
pers or on fixed payments. These *colonii* tended to fall under the thumb of their landlord in all respects, but the humanitarian rulers of the second century occasionally intervened to redress the balance—the medieval manor is in the background but was not to appear for some time yet.

*Romanization*

The general result of the material prosperity of the Empire was the rapid spread of Romanization throughout its lands and seas. Romanization is best defined as the unconscious acceptance of Rome as parent state, for it proceeded on different lines in East and West. In the eastern Mediterranean men already enjoyed a high level of civilization—the Hellenistic—and did not yield to Roman ways. Nevertheless such easterners as Plutarch (c. 46–after 120), writing parallel lives of Greeks and Romans without any prejudice on either side, may be called Romanized even though he did not use the Latin tongue and urged his fellow Greeks to retain their own culture. In the eastern seas only the Jews, buttressed by their faith that they were the Chosen People and by their doctrine which placed religion above the state, consistently refused absorption into the Roman political structure. Trouble between Romans and Greeks on the one side and Jews on the other led several times to bloody revolts of the Jews, which eventually in A.D. 135 brought the complete destruction of the Jewish political state in Palestine.

In the western Mediterranean, on the other hand, the inhabitants were generally on a lower level of civilization than the Romans. Here Romanization accordingly implied acceptance not only of Rome as fatherland but also of Roman civilization proper. This process is of tremendous significance in the later history of Europe; Mediterranean civiliza-
tion was spreading to northern Europe, and in a Roman guise.

Only to a limited extent was the Romanization of western Europe the result of official pressure, even though the government naturally favored the development. In the main the provincials accepted Roman culture of their own free will because they felt it to be superior, because their own culture was weak, and also because they grew to accept Rome as the natural focus of their system. Important as agencies of transmission were the army and commerce. Approximately one-half the army, the auxiliaries, was recruited from non-Roman provincials. In their twenty-six-year term these soldiers learned to speak Latin, to worship Roman gods, and in most ways to appear Roman. The army was stationed in camps along the frontier, which served as powerful attractions for traders; around the camps grew up trading settlements, and eventually cities often arose on the sites of old camps, as at Cologne, Augsburg, and so on. The camps also required large quantities of nearby grain and so encouraged local chieftains to shift to production for market. To transport supplies and also to assist speed of military movements the army built roads and canals throughout the frontier districts which opened the way to commercial expansion.

One result of the Romanization in the West was the destruction or weakening of local cultures and the ever-increasing uniformity of life as reflected in the pottery and other objects which have survived. The provincials of Gaul, of Britain, and of the Danube lands were doing as much as they could if they pulled themselves up onto the level of civilization already attained by Italians, and one finds little advance beyond that point emanating from the newly civi-
lized areas. Now and then in an inscription an earlier form of religion shows through, either in Roman guise or in its barbaric form; sometimes provincial sculpture betrays a non-Mediterranean way of looking at life; but on the whole the more progressive provincials tried to be as Roman as they could. The result was remarkably uniform and, it must be admitted, rather dull.

In men's minds the reflection of Romanization can be seen in the meaning of the term "Rome." Originally the word described a small city-state on the Tiber; by the time of Augustus it included Italy; but by the second century after Christ "Rome" means the Mediterranean world as a whole. "Roman" emperors are born in Spain or Gaul as well as in Italy; "Roman" authors and officials may hail from Britain, Greece, or Syria.

The Cities of the Empire

Externally the great mark of Romanization was the rise of cities all over the Empire. In Italy the remarkable remains of Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Ostia are well known, but even more impressive to the imagination are those cities of Tunisia and Libya which rose in previously almost desert areas, flourished through the Roman rule, and fell into permanent ruin as soon as the Roman state was ended. In barbarian Britain, at the farthest end of civilization, there were cities; along the Rhine and Danube a crown of cities arose from frontier camps and served as leaders to a thriving countryside; even in Asia Minor the Roman Empire completed the city-founding work of Hellenistic rulers. Only in Egypt, the milch cow of imperial finances, were cities discouraged.

This development of urban life in the Empire is significant
when one remembers that Graeco-Roman civilization was
the civilization of the city (civitas, polis). Again, the govern-
ment of the Empire rested squarely on the cities—one may
even say the Empire was essentially a union of cities, held
together by the imperial framework. The emperor and the
provincial administrations, that is, furnished military pro-
tection and settled intercity problems, but the great bulk
of government was carried out by the city proper. An
ancient city held control over the surrounding countryside
so that it would territorially correspond more to an Ameri-
can county than to a simple urban district. Along the fringes
of the hills or other uncivilized areas, wide districts would
be “attributed” to a city, i.e., handed over to the city for
local supervision of their government.

The system of city government varied in details, but
everywhere the main organs were three: annual magistrates,
an advisory body chosen for life, and an assembly of all
citizens. The city was governed by its own locally chosen
officials, and in the first century after Christ the competition
of the wealthier townspeople for the honor of serving as
mayor (duumvir, archon) was intense. On the walls of
Pompeii we can still see the election appeals, but even more
successful than appeals were promises to improve the streets,
to build a gymnasium, to give games at the candidate’s ex-
 pense. Certainly the liberality of the rich toward their native
cities, whether occasioned by ambition or by generosity,
was on an order which can be matched only within the past
century of western civilization.

In the West these relatively new cities conformed to a
general pattern. In the center was the Forum, an open space
crowded with statues to city benefactors, governors, and
emperors. About it would be a colonnade for walks in the
heat of the sun, interrupted at one end by the local temple to the Capitoline triad of Rome, the protectors of the Empire. Other buildings fronting on the Forum might include the local council house, guild halls, markets, and a center for the official worship of the emperors. Elsewhere through the city would be public baths in profusion, temples to old gods of Greece and Rome and new gods of the Orient such as Isis or Mithras, gymnasia, a theater or two, and a huge amphitheater into which most of the town and neighboring population could pour to watch men and animals die in the games. And enfolding all these greater edifices, binding them together, were the paved streets on checkerboard pattern, the tiny shops, and the mass of houses and apartments in which the citizens enjoyed their wealth. There was grinding poverty too, but it slunk away to the corners or escaped into the open fields where the peasants wrestled with the soil. From the material point of view these cities of the Roman Empire represent the apogee of ancient civilization.

Problems of the Empire

It is peculiar perhaps, but nevertheless understandable, that at the height of the Empire one can yet detect serious flaws in its structure which led eventually to its decline. The working out of the factors which accompanied the famous decline and fall of the Roman Empire will fall to the next essay, but our picture of the second century will be incomplete if we do not look briefly at the situation at this time.

The cities began to run into difficulties in the second century. The enthusiasm for electioneering dropped off as economic conditions subtly began to worsen, and we hear of candidates being chosen and elected against their will, then
required to carry out the usual good deeds and bear the administrative burdens of an undesired post. The inner contradiction between the democracy of the cities and the autocracy of the central government was gradually removed, first by the shift within the cities toward oligarchy and then by the far more serious tendency of the imperial government to sap the autonomy of the cities. Because of over-expansion and other reasons cities sometimes could not balance their revenues and so received temporarily a financial expert from the emperor, either at their own request or because the ruler was concerned over the revenues which the cities collected for him. As the century wore on, what was temporary at the outset frequently became permanent, and though by A.D. 180 the cities in the main were still running their own affairs, they were steadily more subject to directives from the imperial administration and to inquisition by the provincial governor.

The resilience of the cities and their citizens, in short, was waning. When one looks to see why the cities were thus suffering from hardening of the arteries, one can detect significant changes in commerce and industry. During the first century the Augustan stabilization, together with the constant expansion of the frontiers, promoted an expanding economy. In the second century, after Hadrian's decision to abandon some of the Trajanic conquests, the frontiers remained static. Industry, as we have seen, tended to become more and more local, so reducing the potential volume of interprovincial trade. Technical progress of industry, which is relied upon today to increase markets and cut costs of production, was very slow in the ancient world, partly because of the existence of slavery, but more because of the divorce
between science and industry and the relative insignificance of industry. Agriculture was always the main profession of ancient man, and the Romans paid much more attention to its improvement than to any other form of economic activity. The more interesting, then, is the fact that in the Empire agricultural science did not improve to any extent; if anything, it slipped backward in the shift from slaves to free sharecroppers.

By the second century the economy of the Empire began to slow, and then to halt, in its expansion. The budget of the state, however, far from changing in accordance, continued to increase as the imperial bureaucracy became more embracing and the imperial functions steadily grew in education, humanitarian activities, and frontier defense against the increasing barbarian pressure. Since state loans were rarely practicable in antiquity, the emperors had no choice but to squeeze ever greater sums out of an economy which was not expanding and in a society which did not like taxes. The results were slow inflation of the currency, forced supply of labor and material to the army, and a host of other devices to gain the needed funds. The conflict between the needs of the Empire and the limitations of its resources may have been an insoluble dilemma; certainly it appears such in the reply of Marcus Aurelius to his soldiers, when they demanded rewards after a victory. He doubtfully refused, “declaring that whatever they obtained over and above the regular amount would be wrung from the blood of their parents and kinsmen.” Marcus Aurelius had to spend most of his rule fighting on Rome’s frontiers, and when he died in 180 the full brunt of the barbarian attacks was yet to come.
The Meaning of the Empire

Perhaps the most basic question which the “Roman peace” raises for a reflective student of history is this: Is materialism enough? The inhabitants of the Empire were generally prosperous in the first two centuries, yet the population stopped growing, perhaps even began to drop off before the end of the second century. Although the cities could afford great public works and monuments in profusion, the mighty Roman Empire produced less great art in two centuries than Athens poured out in three decades—nor would a comparison in literature, philosophy, or the drama redound any more to Rome’s favor. More people could read than ever before in the world’s history, but what masterpieces were the result?

Simply to pin the label of “materialism” on the Empire is, to be sure, to deal in the oversimple, for the Empire was a mass of contradictory trends and developments. Over against the many people who denied an afterlife by placing on their tombstones, “I am not, I was not, I don’t care” (non sum, non fui, non curo), there were hosts who sought in Oriental religions some key to the meaning of life and death. But, taken by and large, the official tone of the Empire may justly be called one of emphasis on the material things of this life, and as such it was severely criticized by great sections of the populace. The Roman aristocrats, who wore themselves out in the idle luxury of the first century, had memories of a higher purpose in life, and in Seneca or Tacitus they vented their criticism of mere money-making. The satirists grew vitriolic on the subject; the Christians were more calmly scornful and perhaps more effective. By A.D. 180 new trends in thought were appearing in the Empire which marked an
incipient swing away from materialism and the first beginnings of a break with the dominant lines of Graeco-Roman civilization. Not only in religion and philosophy but also in art and architecture one can see by the end of the second century that new life was somehow stirring which would lead to the entirely different concept of life in the Middle Ages. Further consideration of these developments must be left to the following essay.

Epilogue

If one turns and looks back from A.D. 180 rather than forward, the story of Roman civilization appears as a fascinating segment of the development of western civilization. Beginning as a small city-state in central Italy, Rome early demonstrated its significant gifts by conquering all of Italy and at the same time reorganizing its internal system of government as a democracy. This dual process was complete by
270 B.C.; thus far Rome had had only intermittent contact with the eastern Mediterranean and its Greek-Hellenistic culture.

From 264 to approximately 133 B.C., as the Romans gained mastery over the eastern Mediterranean basin, the influence of Hellenistic culture became ever greater in the West. Both the ideas gained from the East and the wealth looted from the conquered countries led to trouble within the Roman social and political system, and the last century of the Republic was marked by bloody efforts to solve the problems raised by Rome's expansion.

Finally Augustus provided the answer which we know as the Principate or Empire, and Virgil stated the Roman purpose as one of bringing peace to the civilized world. The Augustan system did secure peace and prosperity for 200 years, during which ancient civilization could recover from the brutalities of the Roman conquest. The synthesis between Greek and Roman civilization already achieved in the first century B.C. was strengthened, and the resulting Mediterranean civilization was spread widely out from the central basin into the East, into Africa, and above all into central and western Europe as far as the Rhine and Scotland. This civilization, which we may describe as rational, naturalistic, urban, nonpolitical, and directed entirely toward life on this earth, was not markedly original; rather it accepted the works and ideas of the past and refashioned them in countless variations. The Middle Ages, it cannot be overemphasized, knew ancient culture almost entirely through the writings of these synthesizers of the Empire. In its system of government and law the purely Roman contribution looms the largest; in its sympathetic attitude toward man—humanitarianism—the Empire broke its freshest ground, as revealed
in many pagans besides Seneca but above all in the body of Christian teaching and practice.

The significance in the general history of man of the "Roman peace" thus lies in two opposed but complementary aspects. First, it allowed a space in which ancient civilization could be pulled together and spread widely; and, secondly, it furnished a superb seedbed in which Christianity and other forces of the future might easily arise. Not to be forgotten, however, is the fact that the firm protection of the Empire allowed secure lives to generations of families living in Mediterranean lands.

To conclude this essay, we could do no better than to revert to Aelius Aristides, the Greek orator from Smyrna, with whom our story began. Aristides, it will be remembered, delivered a great oration in praise of Rome at the city itself in A.D. 144.

Today [he said] all the Greek cities arise again under your rule; . . . the sea coasts and interior districts abound in cities, either founded or enlarged by you and under your government. . . . As if summoned to a feast, all the civilized world has laid down the burden of its arms and has turned to decorate itself and to enjoy the delights of peace. . . . You have made the name of Rome no longer that of a city but of an entire people.

Rarely elsewhere in ancient authors can one find so keen an appreciation of the spirit of Roman government or so well-turned thanks for the prosperity which Rome had brought. That the inhabitants of this world also felt much as Aelius Aristides did is attested by the brief words carved again and again on inscriptions, expressing their gratefulness to "the master of land and sea, the ruler of all the world."