

THE STORY OF THE WORLD

BOOK II.

**THE DISCOVERY OF NEW
WORLDS**

*FROM THE ROMAN EMPIRE TO THE RENAISSANCE
A.D. 4 TO SIXTEENTH CENTURY*



JOAN OF ARC

THE DISCOVERY OF NEW WORLDS

BY

M. B. SYNGE

ILLUSTRATED BY E. M. SYNGE, A.R.E.

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CHAPTER 1

THE ROMAN WORLD

“Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing
grooves of change.”

—TENNYSON.

IN this new century, the story of the world was the story of Rome herself, for she ruled over nearly all the world that was known to the men of these olden times.

Let us remember that we are still talking of two thousand years ago, though we have almost unconsciously glided from the era known as B.C.—that is, Before Christ—to that known as A.D., Anno Domini, the year of our Lord.

It is sometimes hard to realise all that had happened before this time in the far-off ages of long ago. And yet it is all so interesting and so vastly important. It shows us how earnest work and toil raised each nation in turn to a high position, and how the acquisition of wealth or the greed of conquest brought that nation low.

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We must now see how Rome too,—“Golden Rome,” as she was called by the poets of her day,—the Mistress of the World, fell, owing to her desire for wealth and display, indolence and luxury, and how great and terrible was her fall.

While the child Christ was growing up in his quiet home in the East, Cæsar Augustus was still ruling the great Roman world, of which Rome itself was the centre. Augustus did what he could to make Rome, the capital of the whole world, worthy of her name.

Like Pericles at Athens in the olden days, he built beautiful buildings and tried to make the city as famous as possible. Many races met within her gates, many languages were spoken in her streets. Eastern princes and wildy-clad Britons and Gauls, low-browed Egyptians and sunburnt Spaniards,—all might have been seen at this time in the Forum at Rome, together with the Romans and Greeks.

Anxious to communicate with all parts of his mighty empire, Augustus started the imperial post. At certain stations along the great military roads, which now stretched from Rome to Cadiz in Spain, as well as to the coasts of France and Holland, he established settlements. Officers and messengers, with horses and mules, were ready to ride off, at a moment's notice, with messages from the emperor, to those who were ruling provinces under him. Along these great roads the legions of Rome were continually marching to and from the provinces, their tall helmets flashing in the sunlight as they

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tramped along the paved roads to protect the interests of Rome in distant lands.

The “Queen of Roman Roads,” as it was called, was that known as the Appian Way, along which passed the traffic between Rome and the South, extending to Brindisi. It was a splendid road, broad enough for two carriages to pass one another, and built of hard stones hewn smooth.

Thus the countries dependent on Rome could pour their produce into the Golden City; while on the other hand the famous Augustan roads, starting from the golden milestone in the Forum,—the very heart of the Empire,—carried Roman civilisation and life to the western limits of Europe.

Then there were Roman possessions across the sea.

The whole northern coast of Africa was hers, from Carthage to Alexandria. Alexandria was at this time second only to Rome itself: as a centre for commerce she stood at the head of all the cities in the world.

Egypt supplied Rome with grain, which was shipped from Alexandria; the traffic of the East and West met in her streets; she had the finest Greek library in the world, and she was famous for her scholars and merchants.

But the reign of the emperor Augustus was drawing to its end. He was an old man now, and he had reigned over the empire forty-five years.

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There had been peace throughout the latter part of his reign, disturbed only by one battle. This was in Germany, when the Germans won a victory over the consul Varus. It preyed on the mind of the old emperor, and he would sit grieving over it, at times beating his head against the wall and crying "Varus, Varus, give me back my legions."

He was never the same again. He set his empire in order and prepared for death.

"Do you think I have played my part well on the stage of life?" he asked those who stood round him, as he arranged his grey hair and beard before a mirror which he had called for.

Compared with those that came after, he had indeed played his part well. The Romans delighted to honor him. They called the sixth month in the Roman year, August, after him, just as they had called the month before, July, after Julius Cæsar, and these names have lasted to this very day.

CHAPTER 2

A GREAT WORLD POWER

“God’s in His Heaven,
All’s right with the world.”

—BROWNING.

EVENTS which affect us to-day were now crowding thickly together. The Emperor Augustus Cæsar was dead. Tiberius Cæsar ruled the great empire of the Roman world, including distant Judæa, where Jesus Christ was living out His quiet life, teaching a new order of things to those who would hear.

But the Jews—those direct descendants of Abraham the patriarch, who had long ago migrated from Chaldea to the land of Canaan,—the Jews were looking for a great earthly conqueror. They had refused to acknowledge the claims of Christ to be that conqueror, and they wished to bring about His death as soon as possible.

“What thinkest thou?” they said one day—“Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar, or not?”

“Show Me the tribute money,” answered Christ.

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And they brought Him a penny, a Roman penny made of silver, worth about sevenpence-halfpenny of present money.

“Whose is this image and superscription?” He asked them.

“Cæsar’s,” was their answer.

Then saith He unto them: “Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar’s; and to God the things which are God’s.”

This was no earthly conqueror like the Cæsars, whom they could expect to give them high places, to restore to them their rights and exalt them above their fellows. This Man taught that the world must be a great brotherhood, bound together by peace and love. And the Jews put Him to death, crucifying Him, according to their eastern custom.

They had killed Him when He was yet young, but they could not kill His teaching. Under His disciples and apostles it spread rapidly.

“Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel (good news) to every creature.”

These had been among the last commands given to the followers of Christ. Among the first to carry out this great command of his Master was Paul.

The first city he chose in which to preach was Antioch—“Antioch the Beautiful,” or the Crown of the East, as the men of old called the city. North of Tyre and Sidon, on the sea-coast of Syria, it stood, on the great trade-road between Ephesus and the

A GREAT WORLD POWER

East. Here were men from Cyprus and men from Cyrene, here lived numbers of wealthy Romans and Greeks. It was a good place to which to carry the good news. In a year's time Paul had taught many people, and here the name of "Christian" was first given to those who followed the teaching of Christ.

Tiberius the emperor was dead, and Claudius Cæsar was ruling over the Roman Empire; but the new teaching in far-away Antioch had not yet penetrated into the heart of Rome, though the sayings of the Master had been written down in the four books still known as the Gospels.

From Antioch St Paul crossed over to Cyprus, the island to which the Phœnicians had made their first voyage across the seas, and which now belonged to Rome.

After a time he set sail for the mainland of Asia Minor.

Asia Minor was indeed the highway by which Christianity passed to the capital of the world. Travelling from town to town, mainly along the great caravan routes of the country, the faithful apostle reached the sea-coast near the old town of Troy.

Here one night he had a dream. A man of Macedonia, in the bright clothing of that nation, appeared to him.

"Come over into Macedonia and help us," he said.

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Paul could not resist such an appeal. Setting sail, he crossed over to Macedonia, setting foot for the first time on European soil. From thence he passed south to Athens, once the most beautiful city in the world.

Here he would see the great statue of the goddess Athene crowning the Acropolis. He knew how corrupt the city had grown since the brilliant times of Pericles, and "his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry."

Standing on Mars Hill, a lofty rock rising from the very heart of the city, with the clear blue sky of Greece above him, he spoke to the men of Athens from the very depths of his heart.

Again and again we find him travelling from town to town, standing amidst temples and "idols made with hands," and telling the people of the Master he would have them serve instead. At Ephesus, where, glittering in brilliant beauty, stood the great temple of Diana, Paul nearly lost his life in the uproar that followed his plain speaking. But he was ready to die for the Master if need be. Again preaching at Jerusalem, tumults arose which ended in his imprisonment and his well-known trial.

"I stand at Cæsar's judgment-seat, where I ought to be judged," he said, appealing to the highest tribunal in the land. "I appeal unto Cæsar."

"Hast thou appealed unto Cæsar? Unto Cæsar shalt thou go," cried Festus, ruler of the province.



CHAPTER 3

VOYAGE AND SHIPWRECK

“Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

—ACTS xv. 26.



To appeal to the great Roman Cæsar the apostle Paul now set sail for his longest voyage. A convoy of prisoners was starting for Rome, and with them Paul embarked at Cæsarea, a new Roman seaport named after Cæsar: with a fair wind the ship soon reached Sidon. It was the last city on the coast of Syria he ever saw.

Leaving Sidon, the old Phœnician port, the wind blew from the north-west and drove them to

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the north of the island of Cyprus. Still beating against a contrary wind, the ship reached the shores of Asia Minor, and put into the port of Myra, one of the great harbours of the Egyptian service. Here was a ship carrying corn from Alexandria to Rome, a large merchant vessel, which had probably been blown out of her course and taken refuge at Myra. On board this ship Paul and the prisoners were put, and off they sailed once more. Slowly they sailed south against heavy winds and high seas till they reached Crete, where in the harbour, which is known as "Fair Havens" to this day, they anchored to wait for a change of wind.

Time passed, and they were still wind-bound: autumn was coming on, and it was time for navigation in the Mediterranean to cease. The old ships were not fit to brave the storms of winter in the open sea. A discussion took place as to whether they should winter in Crete or push on farther. The owner of the ship was for going on: Paul advised caution.

"Sirs," he said, "I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the cargo and ship, but also of our lives."

In spite of this advice, however, they determined to make for a safer harbour in which to spend the winter. With a south wind blowing softly they set sail, and had neared their desired haven, when a sudden violent wind came down from the mountains of Crete and struck the ship, whirling her round so that steering became impossible. An

VOYAGE AND SHIPWRECK

ancient ship with one huge sail was exposed to extreme danger from such a blast as now blew. The straining of the great sail on the single mast was more than the hull could bear, and the ship might any moment founder in the open sea.

The hurricane blew her southwards, away from Crete, and towards the dreaded quicksands of the African coast near Cyrene.

The violence of the storm continued. After drifting helplessly at the mercy of the wind and waves for two days and nights, they began to throw overboard the cargo to lighten the ship, and then “with our own hands,” says the writer of the Acts, “we threw away all the ship’s fittings and equipment.”

Here is a striking picture of the growing panic. Still the wind blew, no sun shone by day, no stars lit the dark sea by night; cold and wet and very hungry, they drifted on towards death and destruction.

At last Paul made his voice heard above the storm. “Sirs, ye should have hearkened to my counsel, and not have set sail from Crete,” he said; “thus you would have been spared this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but only of the ship.”

The gale continued day and night for fourteen days. At the end of that time, towards midnight, the sailors heard the breaking of waves on a shore.

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They were nearing land, but the danger was still great, for the ship might be dashed on the rocks and go to pieces. In an agony of terror they waited for the dawn. No coast was visible, only a wild waste of waters. The sailors, under pretext of casting anchors, lowered a boat, intending to row off and leave the sinking ship and its two hundred and seventy-six passengers to their fate. Paul saw their intention.

“Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved,” he said to those in authority. They had learnt to listen to the words of this remarkable prisoner. The ropes of the boat were instantly cut, and the sailors’ selfish plan failed.

“This is the fourteenth day that you watch and continue fasting, and have taken nothing. Wherefore I beseech you to take some food: for this is for your safety.”

Again Paul’s advice was taken. Daylight came, land was visible, and they made for a pebbly beach and ran the ship aground. By means of boards and broken planks they all reached land safely, while the old ship which had borne them through the storm went to pieces before their eyes.

They had reached Malta, and the bay where they landed is known to-day as St Paul’s Bay. The sight of the ship attracted the natives on the island—Phœnician and Greek settlers, subject now to Rome—and they treated the shipwrecked crew with unusual kindness.

VOYAGE AND SHIPWRECK

For three months, until February opened the sea again to navigation, they stayed at Malta. Then another corn-ship from Alexandria—the “Castor and Pollux”—took the passengers on board, and sailed for Syracuse in Sicily. Here they waited three days for a good wind, which carried them through the narrow straits of Messina, dividing Italy from Sicily. They passed between chains of snow-clad hills, till at last the merchant ship sailed into a beautiful calm blue bay to unload its cargo, and very soon Paul found himself in the great city of Rome herself.

He had already sent a long letter or epistle to the men of Rome.

“I long to see you,” he had written to them three years before this; “I am ready to preach the Gospel to you that are in Rome also.”

Now he was among them. True, he was a prisoner: a light chain fastened his hand to that of a soldier who was guarding him, though he had his own house in the city.

And here Paul preached the good news he had brought, and the Romans became Christians in such numbers that they were recognised in the city by the emperor.

CHAPTER 4

THE TRAGEDY OF NERO

“Butchered to make a Roman holiday.”

—BYRON.

MANY changes had taken place in Rome since the days of Tiberius Cæsar, who died four years after the crucifixion of Christ. The last of the Cæsars was now reigning in the person of one Nero. So far his youth had not been uneventful. When he was nine years old the Romans kept the great festival of the foundation of Rome. For eight and a half centuries their city had been growing in strength and importance. The last great deed had been the conquest of Britain, after which the emperor had named his little son, Britannicus.

An account of this festival has come down to us. In the great amphitheatre African lions, leopards, and tigers were hunted by Roman officers; gladiators contended with lions, and bulls fought; but one of the chief objects of interest was the appearance of the two little Cæsars, Nero and Britannicus, dressed in military uniforms richly gilt. Britannicus was but six, while Nero was nine, but the two little fellows

THE TRAGEDY OF NERO

took part in a sham fight between the Greeks and the defenders of Troy. The Romans took a great fancy to the boy Nero; and his mother, Agrippina, a very powerful lady, determined that he should be emperor.

When Nero was fourteen another great triumph took place in Rome. The emperor and his wife, Agrippina, sat on two thrones to watch, with the rest of Rome, the captives from Britain led through the streets.

The story about Caractacus, the warrior British chieftain, is well known. He stood before the Roman emperor. It was the custom at a triumph to kill the captives. The other prisoners had pleaded for their lives, but the island chief was proud. Standing before the imperial throne, he spoke fearlessly to the great Cæsar.

“If to my high birth and distinguished rank I had added the virtues of moderation, Rome had beheld me rather as a friend than a captive. I had arms and men and horses, I possessed extraordinary riches: can it be any wonder that I was unwilling to lose them? Because you Romans aim at extending your rule over all mankind, must all men cheerfully submit to your yoke? I am now in your power: if you take my life, all is forgotten; spare me, and as long as I live I shall praise your forgiveness.”

“He ceased; from all around upsprung
A murmur of applause,
For well had truth and freedom’s tongue

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Maintained their holy cause.
The conqueror was the captive then;—
He bade the slave be free again.”

So ends the story: the chains that bound Caractacus were removed, and he passed away from the staring throng of Romans, repeating his gratitude for the emperor's generosity.

When Nero was seventeen he became emperor of the Roman Empire, now larger than it had ever been before, while his mother Agrippina was made regent. For the first few years of his reign all went well. He was a joyous boy, enjoying his life to the full. Chariot-driving was his delight. Even when a child he had a little ivory chariot with horses, as a toy to drive along on the polished surface of the marble table.

But soon he became cruel and revengeful. When he was eighteen he determined on the death of Britannicus, lest he should try to win the empire for himself. The story says that he had poison mixed under his own eyes, and made trial of it first on a pig; then he poisoned Britannicus. The boy died at once.

Wanting to marry a wife to whom Agrippina strongly objected, he determined that his mother must die. A ship was built that would suddenly open in the middle and plunge her, unawares, into the sea. This ship he presented to her himself. It was a splendid-looking galley, with sails of silk. Kissing her passionately, Nero handed her on board. The night

THE TRAGEDY OF NERO



Nero and Britannicus

was warm and dark, though the sky was thick with stars, and the ship glided silently through the waters; till suddenly a signal rang out, and crash went the roof of the cabin, which was weighted with lead.

Agrippina found herself in the water; she struck out for the shore and was picked up by some fishermen. When Nero heard what had happened he was wild with rage, and by his orders she was stabbed to death. Then he married a wife who thought more of keeping good her complexion by bathing daily in asses' milk, than of helping her headstrong husband in the management of his vast empire. Luxury, cruelty, and banqueting were the order of the day, and Nero the emperor was the main actor in the coming tragedy.

CHAPTER 5

THE GREAT FIRE IN ROME

“Darkening the golden roof of Nero’s world,
From smouldering Rome the smoke of ruin curled.”

—WM. WATSON.

IT has been said, and perhaps it is true, that the emperor was mad at times and not responsible for all he did. Be this as it may, the year 64 was marked by a terrible fire in Rome, which lasted nearly a week and left a great part of Rome in ashes.

The summer had been hot and dry. One warm night in July a fire broke out in some wooden sheds where were stored quantities of spices, oil, and other materials likely to feed the flames. It has been said that the emperor himself set the city on fire in his mad rage; and that, posted on one of the highest points of Rome, dressed in one of his dramatic costumes, he took his lyre, and chanted the verses of Homer on the burning and destruction of Troy.

Here is the account from one of the old historians, Tacitus:—

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“All was in the wildest confusion. Men ran hither and thither: some sought to extinguish the conflagration, some never heard that their houses were on fire till they lay in ashes. All shrieked and cried—men, women, children, old folks—in one vast confusion of sound, so that nothing could be distinguished for the noise, as nothing could be seen clearly for the smoke. Some stood silent and in despair, many were engaged in rescuing their possessions, whilst others were hard at work plundering. Men quarrelled over what was taken out of the burning houses, while the crush swayed this way and that way.

“Whilst this was going on at different points, a wind arose and spread the flames over the whole city. No one any longer thought of saving goods and houses, none now lamented their individual losses: all wailed over the general ruin and lamented the fate of the commonwealth.”

The treasures gained in the East, the beautiful works of the Greek artists—statues, pictures, temples,—all were gone. A few shattered ruins stood up from among the ashes, and that was all.

Whispers that Nero had lit this fire grew loud. The emperor trembled. The guilt must be laid on some one. Why not on the Christians, who refused to take part in the emperor's riots and plays, his feasts and banquets. They were regarded with suspicion: they would be better away. As they had burned the city, argued the emperor, they themselves should be burned.

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At the head of the Christians in Rome Paul was now working with his fellow-apostle Peter. He had toiled hard during his two years' residence in the great city, where the people had lost their ideals, lost their old love of freedom for their state, and lapsed into that condition of ease and luxury which, sooner or later, brings every nation to its fall. Paul was an old man now. His appeal to Nero had been successful, and he had been set at liberty. Here he had written his letters to the men of Ephesus (or the Ephesians),—beautiful letters, sad yet full of hope.

Again and again he repeated his charge to the brethren; they must carry on the work. His own end was near, his fight was nearly fought, his course was nearly finished. The end was now come.

One night a great show was announced by Nero to be held in the circus, within the gardens of the Imperial palace, at the foot of the Vatican Hill. It was summer time, and the Roman people crowded to take their places in the circus, now lit up by the flaming torches. The arena was full of stakes to which were tied human beings—Christians—wrapped in cloths of tow steeped in pitch. While these living torches flared and the shrieks of the martyrs rose above the noise of the music, Nero appeared dressed in green, in an ivory chariot, and drove on the gold sand round the circus.

But this was more than the Romans could endure, and, moved to pity, they begged that the dreadful spectacle should cease.

THE GREAT FIRE IN ROME

In this first persecution of the Christians it is said that both Paul and Peter suffered martyrdom in some form or other. Paul, as a Roman citizen, was beheaded; Peter was crucified, as his Master had been before him.

A great revulsion of feeling now set in against Nero. Such tyranny must end in disgrace. As time went on, one by one deserted him: courtiers, slaves, freedmen, all forsook him. At last the very guards at his palace left their post, and he made up his mind to flee from Rome. He could find no one to fly with him.

“Is it so hard to die?” said one man, quoting the poet Virgil.

“I have neither friend nor foe left,” wailed Nero, when the gladiator he had ordered to kill him failed to do it.

It was night, a hot summer night, when the wretched emperor disguised himself and rode forth to seek a hiding-place, where at any rate his life might be safe. Summer lightning was flashing over the Alban Hills: it lit up the road before the flying emperor. He shivered with fear. As the morning dawned he was persuaded to creep into a villa owned by a freedman, Phaon. Through a hole at the back he crawled on all-fours, and threw himself on a miserable pallet inside.

A messenger rushed in with a letter. Nero snatched it from his hand and tore it open. He had been declared an enemy of the state, and was sentenced to die a traitor’s death.

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He must die now. Again and again he strove to nerve himself for the last effort, but it was not till the sound of the horses' hoofs was heard that he put the dagger to his throat.

So died Nero, the last of the Cæsars!

CHAPTER 6

THE DESTRUCTION OF POMPEII

“Those streets which never, since the days of yore,
By human footstep had been visited.”

—SOUTHEY.

IN the days of the Emperor Titus a catastrophe, among the most awful in ancient history, occurred under the still smoking mountain of Vesuvius. For suddenly, without note or warning, two entire cities—Pompeii and Herculaneum—were wiped from the face of the earth. They were buried alive, and the people perished as they were pursuing their daily work and pleasure, by the eruption of the volcano in their midst. “Day was turned into night and light into darkness: an inexpressible quantity of dust and ashes was poured out, deluging land, sea, air, and burying two entire cities, while the people were sitting in the theatre.” So writes an old historian.

Pompeii was an old town near the sea-coast of southern Italy, in a beautiful region under the shadow of Mount Vesuvius. It had been a Greek

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colony in the old days, when the Greeks occupied most of this part. But at this time—79 A.D.—it had been a Roman colony for some twenty-four years, and was a favourite resort of the Romans. It was a miniature Rome, with its tiny palaces, its forum, its theatre, its circus; a miniature Rome, too, in its luxury, its indolence, its very corruption. Crowded in the glassy bay outside were ships of commerce, and gilded galleys for the pleasure of the rich citizens, while the tall masts of the Roman fleet under the command of Pliny could be seen afar off.

It was the 23rd of November, and the afternoon was wearing on, when from the top of Vesuvius rose a lofty column of black smoke which, after rising high into the air, spread itself out into a cloud in the shape of a giant pine-tree. As the afternoon advanced the cloud increased in size and density, while the mountain cast up ashes and red-hot stones.

Panic-stricken, the inhabitants fled from the city, knowing not which way to turn. By this time the earth was trembling beneath them, and shock after shock of earthquake rent the ground. Darkness now came on, and all through that long black night the terror-stricken people must have made their way towards the seashore and along the coast. The account of these days has come to us, vivid in detail, from the pen of Pliny, who was an eyewitness of the whole thing, and whose uncle, commanding the Roman fleet at the time, died, suffocated by the vapour and flames from the burning mountain.

THE DESTRUCTION OF POMPEII

“Though it was now morning,” says Pliny, who was with his mother some fourteen miles from the doomed city of Pompeii, “the light was exceedingly faint and languid. The buildings all around us tottered, and there was a great risk of our being overwhelmed. Then at last we decided on leaving the town. The mass of the inhabitants followed us, terror-stricken, pressing on us and pushing us forwards with their crowded ranks. When we got beyond the buildings we stopped in the midst of a most dangerous and dreadful scene. The sea seemed to roll back upon itself as if driven from its banks by the quaking of the earth, while a black and dreadful cloud, broken by zig-zags of flame, darted out a long train of fire like flashes of lightning, only much larger. The ashes now began to fall upon us. I turned my head and observed behind us a thick smoke, which came rolling after us like a torrent.

“Meanwhile the cloud descended and covered land and sea with a black darkness.

“‘Save yourself,’ now begged Pliny’s mother, thinking this was the end. ‘I am old and content to die, provided I am not the cause of your death too.’

“‘I will only be saved with you,’ answered young Pliny, taking her hand and urging her onwards.”

Another shower of ashes and a dense mist now closed them in, and soon night came on. They could hear the shrieks of the women, the children crying for help, and the shouts of the men through the darkness. Ashes and fire still rained down upon

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them, until at last the dreary night was over. Day dawned; the sun shone faintly through the murky atmosphere, showing the whole country lying under a thick coating of white ashes, as under deep snow.

Though a great number of people escaped, some two thousand were buried by the ashes that completely covered the whole town. For the next fifteen hundred years the buried cities lay wrapped in sleep, their very existence forgotten, their site undiscovered.

Then, in the sixteenth century, a great Italian engineer built an aqueduct right through the ruins of Pompeii. But it was not till two hundred years later that any real discovery took place. Then, by royal orders, men began to dig out the buried ruins of the old towns of Pompeii and Herculaneum. From that day to this digging has gone on at intervals, until now we know just what the old town was like. We can walk over the old streets along which the Romans walked before ever this terrible catastrophe came upon them.

Here, to-day, may be seen the old buildings, houses and villas with paintings on the walls. They are as fresh as if done but yesterday: here are their pavements of mosaic, their baths, their shops, their temples, and the eight gates by which the old city is entered. The streets are very narrow, and it is clear that only one chariot could pass at a time. Still may be seen the marks of the chariot-wheels, crossing and recrossing each other in the few broad streets, but worn into ruts in the narrow ones.

THE DESTRUCTION OF POMPEII

But perhaps most startling of all the strange things to be seen in this old city of the dead past are the very old Romans themselves. Overtaken suddenly in the midst of life, they were covered with the burning ashes, which hardened on them, encasing the human figure and preserving it through the long ages.

So we see them, lying in the museum which stands at the entrance to the town. Mostly they lie in attitudes of terror, some with a hand across their eyes as if to hide out the dreadful sight, some on the point of flight, having hastily taken off their outer clothing. One girl has yet a ring on her finger, while there is a dog still lying as he lay seventeen hundred years before. As a German poet has said—

“The earth with faithful watch has hoarded all.”

The unearthing of Pompeii has revealed much of the ancient habits and customs of the Romans of old in their pleasure-loving days. It has taught us about their houses, their amusements, their clothes, their food. Here are their bake-houses, their loaves of bread, their money, their ornaments; and as we stand in the now deserted streets, looking up to the treacherous mountain above, and away to the blue bay on the other side, we can realise what the old Roman life must have been.

CHAPTER 7

MARCUS AURELIUS

“The most beautiful figure in history.”

—MATTHEW ARNOLD.

FROM time to time in the history of the world men have stood out, one by one, head and shoulders above their fellows,—men whose names can never perish, men whose acts will never die.

Such an one was Marcus Aurelius, emperor of the Roman Empire, but known to history as a great high-minded thinker, a pagan philosopher, true and firm and good in every action and every thought.

His life was not very full of incident: other men have done more and lived through stormier times than did Marcus Aurelius.

As a little boy he came under the notice of the Emperor Hadrian, who made the little Marcus a knight at the age of six. The “most true,” he used to call the child, who even at this time was serious and thoughtful and noted for his truthfulness. Though delicate in health, his mother could not induce him to sleep on a bed spread with sheepskin, so Spartan

MARCUS AURELIUS

was he in his ideas and so anxious to avoid being luxurious and indulgent. He was a Stoic—that is to say, he followed the teaching of a philosopher who lived long ago in Athens. This philosopher used to teach in a painted porch in that city, and *stoa* being the Greek for porch, his followers got the name of Stoics.

At twelve years old he adopted the dress of plain woollen stuff worn by the Stoics. He loved history, he clung to old forms and customs. And so the boy grew up in the heart of Rome with his high standard of duty, his indifference to pleasure and pain, his love of virtue, his simple outlook on life.

Hadrian the emperor had adopted him as his successor.

Marcus Aurelius had already shown himself able and capable in affairs of state. He was made consul at the age of seventeen; he had prepared well for the day when the responsibilities of the great world-empire should be his.

“Modestly take, cheerfully resign.” These words were among his sayings, given to the world fourteen hundred years after his death.

He accepted his great empire with modesty, insisting on sharing it with his adopted brother Verus. Insurrection breaking out in a distant part of the huge Roman possessions, Marcus Aurelius sent Verus to quell it. But the legions employed in this war brought back to Rome the germs of a terrible pestilence, which had followed them along their line of march. The plague that now broke out devastated

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vast districts of the mighty empire, and carried off thousands of victims in Rome itself. Following the plague came a fire, and following the fire came an earthquake. Then disturbances arose on the Danube, calling forth the strength of the empire to repress them. It required all the stoical patience that Marcus Aurelius could command to stand firmly at the helm and steer through these storms—storms which, though he knew it not, were the beginning of the decline and fall of his great empire.

But duty called him from Rome and from home to the long exile of the camp. He was no soldier, but the fate of Rome hung on his presence with the soldiers in the field, and his resolution was staunch. He hated war; but the empire must be defended, and he readily exposed himself to eight winter campaigns on the frozen banks of the Danube. Here, amid the harsh and uncongenial surroundings of war, the great philosopher-emperor wrote his wonderful Thoughts, or Meditations as they are called.

Very pathetic are these great thoughts, tinged with a sadness which came from the hopelessness of his pagan philosophy. Life's day had been toilsome, the evening-tide was very lonely. Wasted with disease from camp life, his spirit broken by the death of his wife and four sons, he waits for the retreat to sound—waits for that death which he knows to be "rest."

MARCUS AURELIUS

“Come quickly, death, for fear I too forget myself,” he cries, as he grows weaker and more suffering.

“Live as on a mountain. Let men see, let them know a real man, who lives as he was meant to live.”

He had indeed lived on a mountain, lived his simple good life with the eyes of the whole world looking on him, and he had shown how it was possible to lead a grand life in the midst of a corrupt age.

His end was as his life had been—deliberate, unflinching, resolute. The habit of duty struggled with his failing body. His friends gathered round him. “Why weep for me?” he says in a passionless farewell; “think of the army and its safety: I do but go on before. Farewell.”

Away from home, at Vienna, on the 17th of March 180, Marcus Aurelius died. Rome forgot the emperor in the man.

“Marcus, my father! Marcus, my brother! Marcus, my son!” cried the bereaved citizens, while Romans whispered to one another, “He whom the gods lent us has rejoined the gods.”

Stoically this man had lived, stoically he died. At a time when national virtue was dead he had stood firm and true; but it was impossible for one man to stem the tide of Roman decline. And the centuries still turn to him for wisdom, and the Thoughts will ever remain imperishable, “dignifying duty, shaming weakness, and rebuking discontent.”

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So he stands from out the ages of the past—
“wise, just, self-governed, tender, thankful,
blameless, yet with all this, agitated, stretching out
his arms for Something beyond.”

CHAPTER 8

DECLINE OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

“And when Rome falls—the World.”
—BYRON.

THE golden days of the great world-empire were now over. With the death of Marcus Aurelius her happiness and prosperity seemed to be gone for ever. She had reached the height of her glory. She had stretched her strong arms over land and sea—over Europe, Asia, and Africa; she had carried civilisation into the farthest limits of the known world, and now her power was ending. Other nations were to rise and play their part in the world's history.

Ten centuries had passed away since those days when Romulus with his small band of shepherds had fortified himself near the banks of the Tiber. During the first four ages the Romans, in the school of poverty, had learnt and practised that virtue which is the strength of nations. Patriotic, industrious, and courageous, they enlarged their

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boundaries, and for three hundred years they had lived in prosperity.

But for the last three hundred years they had been slowly but surely declining. Wealth had poured into their capital; Africans, Gauls, Britons, and Spaniards had lived in their midst; their old simplicity had gone, their spirit was broken, their old vigour had fled. The stern old Roman nature was softened by luxury, enfeebled by wealth, and the outlying peoples of the north were not slow to mark the growing weakness of the empire.

Marcus Aurelius had left a son who was in every way unworthy of his high-minded father. Under him the decline which had already begun went on apace. The empire was put up to auction. One ruler after another rose and fell. Under the African ruler Severus hope flickered up again. He was alive to the dangers of his country, and saw the need for closer union of the various provinces. He spent his time away from Rome, connecting the vast empire by a network of paved roads, which cut through hills and bridged over valleys and rivers. But Severus died at York on his way south from Scotland, and with his unworthy successors hope died away again.

For the next hundred years, emperor after emperor lived and died. But none was great enough or good enough to save the Empire, now tottering more rapidly to its fall; for the people are the backbone of their country, and the Roman people had lost their old spirit.

DECLINE OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Under Diocletian, a soldier risen from the ranks, who was hailed as emperor by the people, the great Empire was divided into two parts. One man was to rule the East and another the West, while each ruler was to select his successor. For twenty years he ruled, and then he made up his mind to give up the responsibilities of empire and retire to private life.

On the 1st of May, in the year 305, a vast number of troops assembled on a great plain beyond the Danube. On a knoll in the midst a throne was erected, on which the emperor sat in the sight of all. Before the gazing crowds he took off his purple robe, his jeweled crown, his imperial ornaments, and put them on his successor. Then descending into the plain he mounted his chariot, drove once more through the streets and away to his seaside palace.

Once, later on, when things were going ill, Diocletian was urged to come out of his retreat and take upon him the purple again, but his answer was ever the same: "Come and look at the cabbages I have planted."

While the Emperor Diocletian was still reigning, a young boy about sixteen, son of the man whom he had elected to succeed him, was growing up to "command the admiration of all who beheld him." Already he had shown himself able and clever. "No one," says the enthusiastic historian, "was comparable to him for grace and beauty of person, or height of stature and greatness of strength."

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This was the future Constantine the Great, who was to take a great step in the history of the world by making a new capital for the Roman Empire, known to us to-day as Constantinople.

While Diocletian was growing cabbages in his country home, Constantine and his colleague ascended the thrones of the East and West. But it was not for long. After a civil war, Constantine became sole emperor.

He will ever be remembered in history for the mighty change he accomplished in the world's religion by becoming a Christian. There is an old story which tells how he decided on this change, from his pagan worship of the Roman gods to his worship of the God preached by Paul in Rome more than two hundred years before.

He was going to battle on the banks of the Tiber, says the story. Suddenly there appeared before the whole army a bright cross of light in the noonday sky, with the words plainly traced round it: "In this sign shalt thou conquer."

That night, when he lay down to sleep, the Christ appeared to Constantine in a vision, with the same sign which he had already seen. He commanded him to make a standard with that sign of the cross upon it, and he should have victory over his enemies.

The following day the soldiers went into battle with the sacred sign on their shields; they

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fought under the standard of the cross and won the battle. And Constantine entered Rome—a Christian.

CHAPTER 9

CHRISTIANS TO THE LIONS

“Follow the Christ, the King;
Live pure, speak true, right wrong; follow the King.”
—TENNYSON.

Now that an emperor of the Roman Empire had for the first time become a Christian, it will be interesting to note what had been happening with regard to the band of Christians in Rome since the days when St Paul and St Peter had suffered martyrdom more than two hundred years before.

Persecution had only served to spread the faith which the followers of Christ would sooner die than give up. Before long little bands of Christians were to be found in many of the cities under Rome. At Antioch, at Alexandria, at Carthage there were large numbers.

Let us see by the lives and deaths of a few of these, what firm root the new faith had taken. In the days of the Emperor Trajan, away in Antioch there lived a Christian bishop called Ignatius. When the emperor had won his victory over the Dacians he ordered that sacrifice should be offered to the gods

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in all the provinces of his vast empire. Ignatius and the Christians in Antioch refused. Trajan ordered that Ignatius should be brought before him, and reproved him for keeping the people from the temples of the gods.

“O Cæsar,” answered Ignatius, “wert thou to offer me all the treasures of thy empire, yet would I not cease to adore the only true and living God.”

When Trajan heard this he commanded that Ignatius’s mouth should be stopped and that he be cast into a dungeon. At first he settled that the bishop should be put to death at once; then he ordered that he should be sent to Rome and reserved for the amphitheatre. Weeping and kissing his garments and his chains, the Christians of Antioch saw Ignatius depart in a ship bound for Rome. There he was led forth into the amphitheatre, where two furious lions were let loose upon him, tearing him to pieces, till nothing was left but a few bones.

Under Marcus Aurelius the persecutions of the Christians still went on, while under his successors it was yet more rigorously pursued.

Some fifty years before the rule of Diocletian there lived at Carthage a bishop called Cyprian, who was the most important Christian in the whole of North Africa. Carthage had been rebuilt since the old days, when the Roman conquerors had burnt the ships in the harbour so dear to the conquerors of the sea: it was now a beautiful city with white walls and houses shining by the blue waters of the

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Mediterranean, rich in temples, gardens, and palm trees. Here, then, Cyprian laboured and taught; here was a strong band of Christians under him, so strong indeed that one of the emperors ordered a wholesale persecution of them.

“Cyprian to the lions” cried the excited crowd of pagans in the city, anxious to please the severe emperor. But Cyprian felt he could serve his cause best by living yet a little, so he took refuge in flight.

Eight years later, he was to show that he was no coward, but ready and willing to die for the faith if need be. The eyes of North Africa were upon him. He knew that an order had gone forth for the execution of all Christian teachers. The Bishop of Carthage knew, too, that he would be among the first to die. He was in his garden when the officers came to take him before his Roman judge. They placed him between them in the chariot and drove to a private house in the town. A supper was prepared for him and his friends. The streets outside were filled with anxious crowds passing to and fro. The next morning found him before the judge. He was commanded to offer sacrifice to the Roman gods. He firmly refused. The sentence of death was pronounced. As it reached the listening crowds of Christians waiting outside, a general cry arose from the heart-broken throng.

“We will die with him,” they cried in their zeal and affection.

He was led away by guards and soldiers to a level plain near the city, and there, surrounded by his

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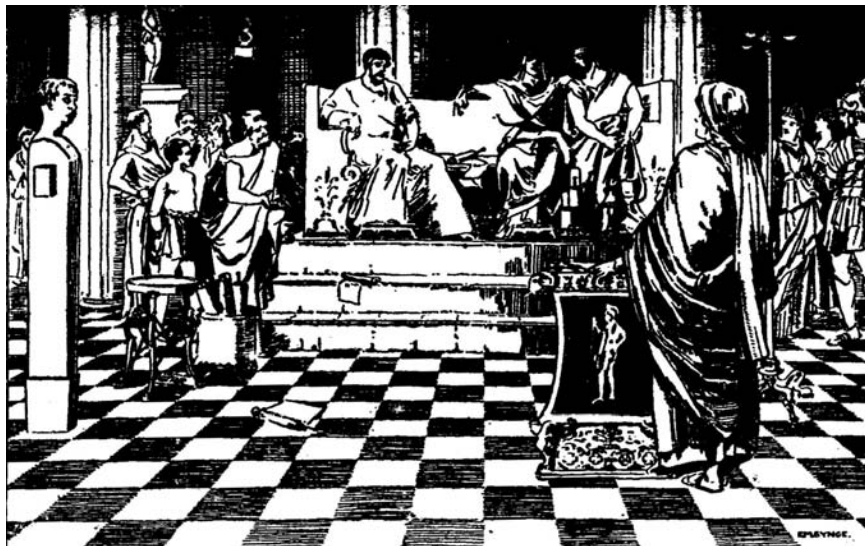
faithful followers, Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage and leader of all the Christians in North Africa, suffered martyrdom.

Not only men but women too were persecuted for their faith in these early days of Christianity. The beautiful legend of St Cecilia, the musician, is one of the earliest handed down to us through the long ages. She was a noble Roman lady, who suffered martyrdom when Constantine was quite a little boy. Her parents, who secretly professed Christianity, brought her up in their own faith, and from her earliest childhood she was remarkable for her enthusiasm over it.

Night and day she carried a copy of the Gospel concealed among the folds of her robe. She loved music, and composed hymns which she sang to herself so sweetly that, says the old legend, angels descended from heaven to listen to her. She invented the organ, and she is usually represented in the old pictures with reeds of organ pipes in her hands. When she was sixteen her parents married her to a rich young pagan Roman, to whom she soon taught her own Christian faith. He was afterwards thrown into a dungeon and put to death for his belief.

At last Cecilia was sent for and ordered to sacrifice to the gods. Tall, young, and beautiful, she smiled scornfully at the idea, while those around her wept and entreated her to yield. So firm was her refusal that others became Christians on the spot, and declared themselves ready to die with her.

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St Cecilia before her judge.

“What art thou, woman?” cried the judge, struck with terror.

“I am a Roman of noble race,” she answered.

“I ask of thy religion,” he said.

“Thou blind one, thou art already answered,” she replied.

Enraged at her cool determination, the judge ordered that she should be put to death, but the hand of the executioner trembled so that he could not kill her. He wounded her and went away. For three days she lived, singing to the end.

A beautiful and simple white marble statue of St Cecilia may be seen to-day in the church dedicated to her memory in Rome; while poets have ever since

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loved to sing of this early Christian martyr, who preferred to die rather than to give up the faith.