THE CHARACTER OF THE ROMANS IN THEIR HISTORY AND THEIR LITERATURE

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BY

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When I received the honorific invitation to deliver this lecture in memory of Professor Todd, I sought, as my predecessors have done, a topic that would reflect his interests and invoke the memory of his personality. This lecture is about the character of the Romans (—and Professor Todd's character was cast in a Roman mould—), but it is not limited to a psychological investigation into the ingredients of character, good or bad, which the Romans praised or blamed in themselves or in their fellow countrymen.

The list of these qualities would be long—from the *pietas* which Aeneas exhibits almost to excess,[1] as an old gentleman displays a white chrysanthemum at a wedding, to that quality of intolerant and intolerable arrogance for which the malice of Cicero coined the name *"Appietas"*[2] as he viewed his predecessor in the province of Cilicia, Appius Claudius Pulcher. The character of the Romans was always composite, and it reflects their history, if at times with that degree of refraction which justifies the ways of men to men. The ups and downs of their fortunes, their dangers and their triumphs; the impact of other peoples as they became their neighbours, their friends, their enemies or their subjects changed them, even if not so much as they changed some peoples of softer metal. And it is to be remembered that, from their very beginning, the Romans, that is, those who looked to the Seven Hills from whence came their help, were a composite people. For Rome, situated like Cambridge or Oxford at a river crossing, attracted to itself at once Latins and Sabines.[3] As a people they were like a homespun tweed in which differing strands were interwoven to form a tough material of a sort of colour easier to recognize than to define and describe. The island that makes

a crossing of the swift-flowing Tiber easy marked its position[4] and was the geographical pivot of its history. The northern element, the Sabines, brought in a strong moral fibre which is praised from the elder Cato[5] to Horace,[6] the more praised as it assumed the flattering *aura* of antiquity.[7]

The community took its name from the city of Rome and was "the People of Rome" as the American state is "the People of the United States", or the Athenian state "the Athenians". For Rome was the head of the body politic in a sense in which London is not the head of the British state or even Paris the head of France. Wherever a Roman was, his affections, like his roads, all led to Rome. And when Constantine at last shifted the balance of the Empire to the East, and founded the city that was soon called after him, the name *he* gave to it was, most probably, New Rome.[8]

Rome did not, like some great cities such as the one in which we meet, look to the sea: it looked to the land. The sea, so mutable, so un-Roman in its changing moods, did not match the Roman mind, which was rooted in the soil. For the Romans were, above all, a peasant people, racy of the soil, and its territory was, to begin with, the *ager Romanus,* conquered by the sword and in subjection to the plough. Virgil was at his most Roman when he wrote his *Georgics,* the epic of the farmer—*"quid faciat laetas segetes"*[9] and so on. That was always the prosaic present of Rome, as *arma virumque*—the opening words of the *Aeneid*—was its romantic mythological past. To Cicero, who in such matters was a good judge, the People of Rome was a community bound together by a practical association of joint interest and common right,[10] and its state was the *res publica,* the people's business, the people's interests, and that was that.[11]

As in his home and household the *paterfamilias* had as his first duty the management of its affairs for its own good and no other, so to the Romans the conscientious, unself-regarding care for the people's interest was the duty of the magistrates, summed up in the short and pregnant word *fides.*[12] There was a time when the Roman community had been ruled

by an alien aristocracy of conquerors, the Etruscans, who bequeathed to it a stronger, more comprehensive concept of ruling power than was given to any other ancient people so far as can be seen—symbolized by the *fasces,*[13] that business-like combination of rods and axes, the sign of the *imperium* in its plenitude of power. And, when the alien rulers were driven out, the Roman Republic endured, for limited periods and in collegiality, the rule of the consuls no less unfettered than that of the Kings. What its rulers ordained was a command and what the people ordained was a command too. When the Roman people said 'yes' it was a command, as also when it said 'no' it was a prohibition; but its choice was limited by the belief that only in a multitude of counsellors there is wisdom, so that the ruler should be advised by the elder statesmen of the Senate and the people should only speak when it was spoken to. The citizen of Rome had the right, not to do what he would but to do no more than the laws enjoined on him, to suffer no more than the laws allowed. This to the Romans was "liberty"[14]—a concept narrower and less intellectual than the Greek *eleutheria,* and it was dangerous to encroach upon their liberty except, if need be, under the harsh constraint of war and in the field of war. For sufficient reason Romans were obedient, but only for sufficient reason enshrined in tradition which was the capitalized experience of statecraft as the skill of the farmer is the capitalized experience of his kind. The converse of this limit of liberty was the acceptance of the guidance of his betters, which was rewarded by their claim to be followed, obeyed and honoured. The legacy of aristocracy derived from the Etruscans endured to be the setting of the authority of the magistrate. A Roman demanded to be free: he did not demand to be equal, and if a Roman ever thought—in an imaginative moment—that men were born free and equal, he was apt to believe that equality was refuted by the facts of life once life began. There is no dictum more suited to a peasant than the dictum "by their fruit you shall know them" and it was to the Roman self-evident that men who had ruled with wisdom and courage had proved their

worth by that fact. And as the state prospered, the *'mos maiorum'*—the way things had been done—became the key to future success.

Thus the Romans were at once conservative and conventional, except that in war they were less allergic to innovation than most military nations have been.[15] This conservative character shortcircuited the need to think anew in most matters by the instinctive belief that experience which is gained from practice was the best guide where problems were recurrent, as they were to the Romans in the beginning of their advance to power; and this economy of thought was summed up in the idea of authority (*auctoritas*)[16] which assumed that power would be used conscientiously for the general good by those whose experience and inherited devotion to the community stood above question. And so far as the Romans revered their gods, their *pietas,* which they came to regard as a justification of their success, enjoined upon them the duty to play fair by the gods, if only because the gods, if neglected, could do more harm to the community than the community could do to the gods. Their religion was not a thing of emotion; it was honest dealing between men and heaven: precise, formal, conscientious, so that, if the farmer left his farm to go to war, the gods would do their best for the farm he left. Religion was, what it means, 'a bond' and a Roman's bond was indeed better than his word, or at least quite as good and more durable. The device of that hard-headed, hard-handed English king, Edward the First, was the two Latin words *pactum serva,* which was his brief answer to many problems even if it did not always apply. All these notions combined together to make the Romans as self-confident as they were self-centred.

But I must not dilate further upon the political institutions of the Romans. I have had my say about that elsewhere.[17] Most of the time, an ordinary Roman was not much concerned with such matters, provided his liberty was not encroached upon. When that happened they sought redress and protection by officers of their own, and the protection was granted to them. When we think away the political conflicts which later writers

attributed to them in the manner of their own times, the main concern of the ordinary Roman in this stage with politics was really like that of the innkeeper in Dickens who was content, just now and then, "to put on his boots and vote for the gentlemanly interest". They remained, as I have said, rustic. They liked the country, its sounds and its smells, though the odour that most attracted them was the smell of a field that the Lord had blessed. They approved of the sea as a spectacle, storms and all, as Lucretius was to say.[18] The were fond of flowers and had an interesting vocabulary of colours. They did a little hunting in an amateurish way, and no doubt honest poachers laid their snares. But the nobles would rather ride than walk and rather be carried than ride. The Roman peasant rose early, worked hard, and lived an abstemious life. His betters, about whom there is more evidence available from the Middle Republic onwards, drank quite enough, ate too much and took too little exercise—except when campaigning. There is a passage in the *Natural History* of the Elder Pliny[19] which records the healthy effect on a Roman consul of a hard-fought battle on a hot day in the south of France.

Within their houses the *paterfamilias* ruled with a fine absolutism. For their womenfolk the Romans always had a high regard, being indeed more domesticated than the Greeks. Perhaps the most famous domestic interior in English poetry—

> For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn
> Or busy housewife ply her evening care:
> No children run to lisp their sire's return
> Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share.[20]

comes from a Roman poet,[21] save that he said it in two lines instead of Thomas Gray's four. In the highly intermarried and, if I may say so, inter-divorced best set of the late Republic, women had much influence not always ill-applied. But in *all* classes the Roman matron had more freedom, more responsibility, better treatment than has normally prevailed in the Mediterranean world. She enjoyed, in fact, the rare felicity of having what she wanted—though not rights. In general,

the Romans of the early and middle Republic were rather dour: rather glum, though with some imagination at short range; hard bargainers, though fair-minded: singularly courageous in adversity, prudential and sagacious.

Such were the Romans, as such people in such a setting are apt to be. They were not prone to speculation; observant about what directly concerned them, as you may tell from Cato's work on Farming, but incurious about most things else. When a Roman wanted to say just what he meant—as he generally did—his native Latin, though less subtle than Greek, enabled him to say it with exactness and without ambiguity. And though, with time, Latin became more flexible, more metaphorical, inclined to repetition and a trifle pompous, it never lost, to judge from what remains of Latin in the Middle Republic, a sturdy quality, a robust emphasis that well expresses the people that created it. And when Latin became elegant what it meant by *elegance* was above all the right word in the right place.[22] The Roman aristocracy found its most intellectual activity in the formulation of law, but the quintessence of their statecraft is in the most Roman of all Roman maxims—the people's safety is the highest law—*"salus populi suprema lex"*. And so laboriously and slowly Rome grew to power—*"tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem"*.[23] And with a sensible, unjealous liberality of mind—admired by people who did not practise it—they admitted to their citizenship some of their neighbours and, by and large, dealt fairly with the rest. Another instinct, their common sense, their toughness of spirit, had its reward. When Rome's interests conflicted with those of her neighbour, Rome caused her interests to prevail, if need be by war.

And Roman statecraft was shrewd in contriving that Rome made war with the odds on her side. War to the early Romans was not an adventure, a thing to be proud of, it was "the continuation of policy by other means". We think of the Romans as warlike, but no Roman writer glorified war. The Romans thought that peace was better than war; but that victory was better than defeat. One victory they nearly always

made sure of, and that was victory in the final battle. And in success they were as wisely moderate as they were unyieldingly determined in adversity. Slowly Roman power extended, first over Central Italy, then over Southern Italy, then over the northern part of the peninsula. By skilful diplomacy the Romans turned old enemies into allies, from whom they asked nothing except that their military strength should be at the call of the Republic. By now, after the Republic had been going nearly three centuries, the Romans had formed a habit that was to be of great importance for the history of the ancient world. They limited their interference in the affairs of their neighbours to the minimum required by Roman security now and in the future. They prized what we would call the Roman way of life; they would die rather than surrender it; but they did not seek to impose it on others. Their restraint was rewarded by trust; and when the greatest enemy of Rome, Hannibal, invaded Italy and won resounding victories, the strong political system Rome had built up did not break down. Neither the Romans nor most of the Italians despaired of the Republic; and the solid strength of Rome triumphed over genius.

So far it is, you see, the somewhat prosaic story of a somewhat prosaic people, a people with shrewd instincts rather than bright ideas. For what we now call ideologies the Romans had little use. A Roman would not know what you meant if you spoke of an ideology, unless he was educated enough to be aware that it was bad Greek for an unroman think. For, in good Greek, ideology did not mean the pursuit of ethical or political ideas—it meant the study of physics.

And then, almost in her own despite, Rome ceased to be a purely Italian power and became a world power.

There were in the Mediterranean world at that time three great monarchies, which shared the inheritance of the Empire of Alexander the Great, two of them active, Macedon and Syria, one passive—Egypt. The first two crossed the path of Rome, and Rome broke them. Many smaller powers, willingly or unwillingly, became Roman satellites. And various areas passed under direct Roman control as provinces. Man-

power, sagacity, courage, an instinctive judgment in war and diplomacy, together with a large admixture of good luck, had by the middle of the Second century B.C. made Rome dominant in the Mediterranean world. How did the homespun virtues of the Roman governing class wear in this new climate? I am afraid, they did not wear well. In their own circle, and under the eye of their equals, Roman nobles kept the old tradition of conscientiousness. But when Roman grandees went abroad to see that Rome got her way and her revenues, they were apt to leave their consciences at home. They felt they could do pretty much what they liked, and the Senate, now the effective government in Rome, did not—perhaps could not—do enough to stop them. And the reasonableness of Roman policy was now puctuated by moments of impatient terrorism or phases of almost irrational malignity.[24] The philhellenism which made Rome admire the past of Greece did not always extend to its present. The Senatorial aristocracy was, by law or custom, debarred from trade and from making money at home, except through the ownership of land. It had become extravagant and spent more than its land would yield, so it was apt to make money by the spoils of war or the abuse of government abroad. The Roman nobility, now a closed circle of families that monopolized high office, was able and experienced, but class-conscious and conservative. It had, it is true, acquired a good deal of Greek culture and some understanding of Greek ideas. An eminent Greek philosopher, Panaetius, adapted the philosophy of Stoicism to make the best of the ethical ideas, the public spirit, the conscience of the Roman gentry. He produced a kind of philosophy of empire, which did proclaim Rome's duty to her subjects. Herein it was an appeal to what was best in the Roman governing class. But even enlightened Romans were so far pessimists that they looked back and not forward to find better days, or doubted whether more could be done than keep things as they were. Their statecraft was weak in the field of economics, for they only understood the economics of landowning, and they saw these only from above, from the angle of substantial landowners,

which indeed they were. The idea of 'dignity', of which I spoke earlier, became a danger. There were too many men who claimed it: the political stage became too crowded with actors, all burning to play the leading rôles which they thought their due. The rule of the Senate was really a convention: the constitution still provided for the sovereignty of the People, when it was invoked. And well-intentioned men and, still more, ambitious men who could not get their way by working with the Senate, worked against it through the Assemblies of the People. But, with very few exceptions, all Roman political leaders were aristocrats, trying to defend or trying to win, their own way, their own advancement, their own dignity. Those who have often been called the democrats were not in the least concerned to secure that "government of the People by the People and for the People should not perish from the earth". They were not like men breasting the dawn up the hills of progress; they were like men trying to get on a bus, already overfull. Their intention was to drive it themselves, or at least collect the fares. And they are not made democrats by the fact that most of those already in the bus believed it to be, not a bus, but a tram.

And there were not in Rome what *we* know as parties, i.e., large political groups governed by principles and programmes to which they might not be unfaithful. For some eighty years after, the nearest thing the Romans knew to democrats, the Gracchi,[25] had challenged the conventions of the constitution, and had perished, wars and civil wars, for short periods, thinned the political stage, but it filled up again—not, it is true, with the pantomime figures of depravity to which the conventional abuse of Roman political controversy reduced the good and bad alike. There were men of great capacity who sought good government, though hardly ever without an admixture of self-seeking. The Roman military machine became more and more efficient— the power of the Republic was extended to the Euphrates and the Rhine—but the legions were prone to serve their generals rather than the State. The competence and the ambition of the Roman

aristocracy—for it was as competent as it was ambitious—reached its climax in Julius Caesar. With the impatience of a man who believed—not without reason— that no one else could do the job, he imposed a personal autocracy on the Roman Republic. The reaction of the old order—with its ideals and its illusions—was his assassination by men he had pardoned, men he had promoted, men for whom he cared. The ancient tradition, and Shakespeare, provided him with various last words, but there is a deep irony in the best attested of them all, in the indignant surprised cry that broke from the lips of the master of thirty legions "Why this is violence".[26] It was more than the dying words of a dictator—it was the epitaph of an age. The civil war that had made Caesar autocrat was followed by a civil war that avenged his death. And this was followed by a clash between his adopted son Octavian and his lieutenant Mark Antony. Antony of whom my friend Mr. Charlesworth once said that he was "a great leader of men and a great follower of women", became the consort of the last of the great Macedonian princesses, Cleopatra, who wished to revive the ancient power of Egypt. Octavian, cool, crafty and determined, became the leader, the Führer, of the Republican west, that had not endured an autocrat and would not endure the consort of a Hellenistic Queen. In seeking to move the centre of gravity of the Mediterranean world to the East, Antony, by his defeat, fixed it firmly in the West. The Roman world was reunited, and the day of an Eastern and Western Empire was postponed for centuries. Weakened by the bloodletting of three civil wars, the Roman aristocracy accepted the tactful rule of Octavian as the price of peace. And the Roman People rejoiced that the nightmare of civil wars was over. Octavian received the name of Augustus, and provides a most striking instance of the old poacher turned gamekeeper.

Meanwhile in the period of the Civil Wars, the effect of various social changes had worked themselves out. The wealth of Rome had drawn to the city an expensive *demi monde* often highly cultivated and accomplished, and Roman matrons undauntedly fought their rivals with their own weapons, good

or bad.[27] The Second Estate, the Knights, are less visible to the political historian than the high aristocracy. Most of them were immersed in finance—their trade their politics—rallying to defend the State, and that—to them—meant defending the rights of property, the prestige of wealth and the security of overseas investments. Among the Knights there were doubtless many quiet, prudential, buttoned-up, cultivated gentlemen, like Cicero's friend, Atticus, but they did not set the vogue.

The Roman People were often indifferent, sometimes excitable, capable of generous enthusiasm and national pride. It has been said it is impossible to fool all the people all the time. Some Roman politicians, to do them justice, never ceased to attempt the impossible. There were, no doubt, at Rome and still more in the towns and villages of Italy, now included in the Roman state, many admirable thrifty orderly peasants, small shopkeepers and artizans. But little was done for them, and, in Rome itself, the riffraff riffed and raffed all over the place.

Augustus was not a man of genius in the sense that Alexander the Great or Napoleon deserve the name.[28] Nor was he a great Roman aristocrat like his adoptive father Caesar. He was sprung of the small Italian gentry with their hardheaded bourgeois virtues. And he substituted for the Republic of the aristocracy the Empire of the upper middle class. An astute manager of men, able to use those gifts in others which he did not himself possess, a laborious and clear-sighted administrator, he reformed the government of the Roman provinces to their great advantage. He made the army his servant, and established a mechanism of government in which there were great careers for the great, and small careers for the small, but both under his own control. With the help of Agrippa, one of the greatest soldiers Rome ever produced, he advanced and strengthened the frontiers of the Empire, till it became a kernel of peace in a husk of war. Within the frontiers there was peace, a more enduring peace than the world had known before, or has known since. At a

turning point in history he was one of the greatest servants of the human race.

Now I must look back and say something about the Romans as revealed by their literature, for the art of the early Republic, so far as it does not follow Greek models, it notable only for a strong veracity in portraiture.[29] Roman poetry had been slow to develop. Now and then, in the third and second centuries B.C. it had added to Greek forms memorable lines that had the peculiar weight and force that Latin could command; in comedy Plautus and Terence borrowed from the Greeks, the one with native gusto, the other with a kind of grace. The elder Cato, who seems to have been of the intellectual stamp of the scholar we are commemorating, brought a trenchant austerity of mind to the expression of sagacious common sense and thereby became a landmark in Roman literature and oratory. In the age of Caesar Catullus wrote lyrics that throb and burn with passion. He came from the Celtic North of Italy, from Verona. More truly Roman was Lucretius with his great didactic poem on the nature of the Universe. He was, if I may adapt a famous formula of A. E. Housman, a greater poet than Lord Rutherford, a greater physicist than Lord Byron; he vehemently urged, with missionary zeal, a Greek doctrine of release based on a Greek doctrine of an atomist universe with an atom that could not be split in a universe that could not be expanded. But he did it with a Roman directness and a Roman force. He was a man of nobility of spirit and eminence of mind, of notable dialectical vigour, and when he took time off to be just a poet, he was one of the greatest. I am not competent to assess him as a man of science—what even I can say is that no man of science can have had the root of the matter more deeply in him. Among historians there was Sallust, who assumed the mantle, but lacked the mind, of Thucydides. He was a good performer in his chosen style, who deserved the vogue he enjoyed under the Empire. He was a moralist for external application only, and one has to remember that truth is not the monopoly of the sincere.

A more respectable historian was Asinius Pollio. A few phrases of his survive, which show him a man of impatient integrity with an astringent style. Caesar himself was an eminent orator and a writer who deserves more attention as a stylist than ingenuous youth has been able to give to him. And there was Varro, a man of immense and varied learning; a soldier of a kind; as Gibbon was a soldier of a kind when he was a captain in the Hampshire Grenadiers. Finally, there was Cicero, the man of this age whom we know best, a wit, an orator, an essayist, a letter writer, half a philosopher, more than half a statesman, a quarter of a poet, the most cultivated and civilized Roman of his day. A Polish scholar has said of him that his real biography began on the day of his death. For he has counted more than any other man in the spread and permanence of the fused culture of Greece and Rome, on which all European culture has drawn.

The new era of hope inaugurated by Augustus was the age of the greatest Roman poet Virgil, and the neatest, the most friendly, Roman poet Horace. I would admit that Virgil is inferior to Homer, but he is no more inferior to Homer than he is superior to Milton. And I admire Milton more than some modern critics. Of Horace I would only say that he only ceases to be a poet to those who believe that poetry begins where intelligibility ends. The long story of Rome was brilliantly described in a kind of prose epic by Livy, an honest man of letters and a master of narrative. But as, decade after decade, the reign of Augustus wore one, the pulse that had beat so high flagged. The welcome for what was new and the sense of high endeavour were dulled and in the field of philosophic speculation, of science, of mathematics, the Empire rested on its oars. There was learning and scholarship, but not the resolute adventurous pursuit of truth.

In Economics, the peace, the safety of the long roads and the paths of the sea, the fact that the Mediterranean world was securely one, meant a wide spread of industry and of the interchange of goods.[30] It was an era of multilateral trade. There was slavery, but good times made good masters, and

the efficient—though perhaps too small—Roman army made but slight demands on the manpower of the Empire. In the century that followed the accession of Augustus the trade policy of the State was to leave well alone. Taxation was moderate and fairly distributed, and there was little exploitation of the provinces. In the Eastern half of the Empire the political and cultural liberalism of Rome permitted, and even encouraged, the permanence of Greek institutions and Greek art and letters, of which the Romans were unjealous connoisseurs. In the West, the Romans spread widely and took with them their language, their literature, and a form of municipal government that had taken shape within Italy. Of all the achievements of the Empire the romanization of the West was the most fruitful and the most enduring.

There were a few frontier wars, a few short-lived insurrections, a year of struggle for the throne when the dynasty that Augustus started had, at last, outstayed its welcome. But these troubles did not cut deep, and the next Emperor, Vespasian, who survived in the competition, was shrewd, hardheaded and competent. The Imperial machine ran by its own momentum, and to derail it meant chaos. The position of the Emperor, whose single will outweighed all other wills, was nearly that of an autocrat. But a near-autocrat was better than civil war. Even so, it was hard to reconcile with liberty in the ordinary sense. And if the State was the people's business as well as the public interest, the people had no say in their own business. Rome had, in fact, outgrown the political ideas of the Republic. And Vespasian's second son, Domitian, made this only too clear. The Roman upper classes were no longer his allies: for he had made them his enemies. They were reduced to insincere servility or silent hatred. On his death, the Roman aristocracy found its revenge in the account of the emperors written by Tacitus, the next great figure in Roman literature. He added to a respectable industry in the eliciting of facts, a diabolical insight into the upper layers of the human mind. Omelettes, I am assured, are not made without breaking eggs, and epigrams are not

made without breaking truths. Tacitus was the most eminent maker of epigrams of all men who have written history. Compared with him, Gibbon is a maiden aunt. Latin has for many centuries been regarded as the right language for epitaphs written by a friend; Tacitus showed what it could achieve in the hands of an enemy. But, beyond that, he had a power of moving description, a quality of intellectual or emotional force, of effective composition that shows what history can claim to be as a literary art.

To return. A rather one-sided reconciliation between the Empire and liberty was found. It was found in the doctrine that the Emperor should be *the best man,* chosen to bear the heavy burden of being Emperor, and counting himself a servant as well as a master.[21] And the best man might be sought wherever he was to be found. The fact, or the assumption, that the Emperor was chosen out as *the best man* made the best people able to endure his rule without loss of self-respect. There follows a series of Emperors of provincial extraction who justified their choice. It is the reigns of these emperors which Gibbon, in a famous phrase, described as "the period of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous". And it was this in the Indian summer of the traditional civilization of the Ancient World.

As there had been a fusion of civilizations in literature, so during the period I have been describing there was a fusion of Greek artistic ideas with Roman.

To return once more to Augustus: the reliefs that are to be seen on the famous and beautiful Altar of Peace at Rome are not either of the old Roman type nor simply an imitation of Greek. There appears a composed dignity, a harmony of Greek and Roman ideas, and this governs the art of the Empire. Architecture shows the same kind of thing, reinforced by the Roman genius for engineering construction. There comes in a notable skill in making high buildings and great halls, especially by the use of true concrete, a characteristic Roman invention. In the western provinces

art and architecture derive from Rome and are Imperial. It is the art and architecture, not so much of peoples as of an Empire, just as was Persian art in the days of the old Persian Empire. The great fire of Rome under Nero gave elbow room for architects; and painting, an art for which the Romans had a special aptitude, flourished, as can be seen at Pompeii till its destruction. Architecture became more complex and resourceful. The Roman armies, for instance, built very fine permanent installations. The narrative decoration, which suited the practical Roman mind appears on the Arch of Titus and the Column of Trajan, which are masterpieces in this manner. The general prosperity enriched men throughout the whole Empire, who were liberal in presenting their cities with handsome public buildings which may still be seen, most of all in Syria and North Africa. Gradually there are signs of separate provincial arts[32] and at Trèves there was an outcrop of something like baroque. And the truly Roman element in art is slowly submerged.

In education, which after all forms character, the Romans of the Empire assimilated their practice to that of the Greeks, and, as in some Greek cities, it became the concern of the State. The staple of education was rhetoric; this affected literature, partly because people practised declamation on a theme, partly because it became the fashion to write things to read aloud to one's friends. How long they remained your friends depended on what was read to them. The result of this fashion was that what the Romans now wrote had to have the arresting intelligibility of a modern broadcast. The Romans ceased to wish to see full-dress plays and preferred to see mimes. These might vary between something like the Grand Guignol, a ballet, or a single-handed performance like that of the late Miss Ruth Draper. The actors and actresses were often very skilful singers and dancers, highly paid, applauded—and despised. Apart from that, mimes were to the Romans rather what ordinary films are nowadays to ordinary people as contrasted with serious drama for serious people. Serious drama became something to be read in the

study or the drawing room, not to be acted on the stage. There were novels and slight works of amusement, broader than they were long. In philosophy, Stoicism was the fashion among the Roman upper class. Cynicism—which had not the character we call cynical—was, for the most part, a philosophy of the street corners preaching contempt for the allurements of the world. But Stoics or even Cynics might be either courtiers or martyrs or the private chaplains of the great. Science was comparatively sterile. In the *Questions about Nature* of Seneca you find an accumulation of observed phenomena, a kind of interest in the physical universe, but no real ardour to advance through experiment to speculation or to set back the borders of darkness. The great jurists of this and the succeeding age elevated the study of law to the philosophic justification of common sense and common humanity. Otherwise you have specialist works of a practical character but with a general background of knowledge: few books are more truly Roman than that of Vitruvius on Architecture, which is a triumph of mind over matter. But you may have your feet so firmly planted on the ground that you cannot advance, and there is in general a flatfooted quality about Roman intellectualism at this time.

You may have observed that at the beginning of this lecture I manoeuvred across from Rome to the Romans, and now it is time for me to manoeuvre back again. For by now the Romans are being absorbed as it were, into the Roman Empire. It is no longer the descendants of the pure-blooded Romans or even the Roman-Italian race that bear the burden, that fill the legions and monopolize the central administration. First the romanized West and then the hellenized East take a share in the central government. In the reign of the emperor Hadrian the Senate contained only one member of the ancient patrician aristocracy of Rome. There he was, preserved like a fly in amber to show it was the genuine article. But the tradition of Roman statecraft governed the State. Marcus Aurelius wrote his famous *Meditations* in Greek, not in Latin, but he did so in the time he could spare from arduous

campaigning as one of the great soldier rulers of Rome in the Roman tradition. By this time, the impact of barbarian invasions was already dinting the rather too closely drawn frontiers of the Empire. When the predecessor of Marcus Aurelius was dying he gave as the watchword of the day "Equanimity", and it perished with him. The golden age of a prosperous world, based on the ancient civilization and ideals of Greece and Rome was passing away. The choice of the best man was replaced by the self-choice of ambitious soldiers, who ruled as undisguised autocrats. A prolonged period of wars, made worse by plagues and economic dislocation, threatened the prosperity, the unity, and the defences of the Empire. In the effort to survive, the old liberalism and freedom were replaced by a rigorous bureaucracy and a caste-system that stifled initiative and enterprise. And though slavery declined, a kind of serfdom grew. More and more the citizen was the slave of the State instead of the State the servant of the citizen. At last a series of soldier emperors from what is now Yugoslavia restored the territorial unity of the Empire and drove back the barbarian. These emperors were not Romans by birth, but they held firmly—in a sergeant major kind of way—to the old tradition of pagan Rome. It seemed to them that the Christian Church, now organized from end to end of the Empire, threatened its military and religious morale. But persecution closed the ranks of the Church, and it was too strong to yield. And then Constantine, by what was, at the lowest, a great act of statesmanship, reinforced the State by linking with it the Church.

This was destined to have a great effect on the course of civilization. For, in the Dark Ages, the Church shielded the flickering light of Roman culture and Roman intellectual disciplines. Through Saint Augustine and other Fathers of the Church classical philosophy was kept alive, converted to the service of Christianity and so, in this guise, transmitted to modern times. The Canon Law of the Church preserved the inheritance of Roman jurisprudence. Latin, the language of Churchmen, lived on to become the international language

of the Middle Ages, not only for diplomacy and polite conversation or the impolite songs of wandering students, but for philosophical debate and scientific inquiry. This heritage continued, until Bacon and Milton, Newton and Copernicus, Descartes and Spinoza wrote some or all of their best work in Latin.

In the great shipwreck of the Western Empire much of the civilization which Rome had fostered was to perish. But not all. There still stood on guard for a thousand years the Eastern Empire based on Constantinople, theocratic, formalized, almost ossified, but with an indomitable permanence. Roman Law—the greatest intellectual achievement of the Roman aristocracy—was preserved to be codified by Justinian. And Rome lived on in the romance languages of the west. The great roads, the splendid bridges and aqueducts, the buildings in which Roman architects revealed the wealth and public spirit of Italy and the provinces, remained. The arts of government which the Republic and the Empire had devised for their own power and the ordering of the world in peace were not wholly lost. It had been Rome's practice to learn from her enemies: now her enemies learned from Rome, and what they learned, lasted. And so my story ends. It is no doubt true that other ancient peoples, above all the Greeks, surpassed the Romans in the illumination of the human mind and the liberation of the human spirit. But with the limits that their character has set to their activity, the Romans were the toughest, the strongest, the most enduring, and, on balance, the most beneficent of the peoples of the Ancient World.