# THE EMPEROR AND HIS CLIENTS

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# THE EMPEROR AND HIS CLIENTS

MR. VICE-CHANCELLOR, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

I feel it a very great privilege to be here with you tonight to deliver the second Todd Memorial Lecture—a great privilege and a great pleasure. It has been a long way to come, and long ways, today, are hard ways. But we have a married daughter in New Zealand to draw us, and *Vicit iter durum pietas* ("Love has overcome the difficulties of the way"). But, just as Aeneas needed something beside his *pietas* to achieve the descent to the shades—his Golden Bough of Proserpine—so we too should hardly have made our journey "Down Under" without our own Golden Bough, which in this case was your invitation to me to lecture.

The Todd Lecturer has to face the high standard set by the first lecturer, your own Professor Smith, and due to the great scholar whom the lecture was established to honour. He must try to give of his best, and he must try to find a theme of general human interest suited to the occasion. You will not wish to listen to subtleties of research, but will expect rather to have light thrown on the character and ways of the ancient Romans. My own lifework has been devoted to the study of the coinage of the Roman Empire, and, looking back on it, I think I have found a theme, which has become real to me after much labour, which is intensely human and which has an enduring interest for all who live in communities at all comparable with the Roman. In speaking to you of the Emperor and his clients I hope to help you to realise something of the character of the two sides in the great game of Empire—the governor and the governed.

In handling any particular class of evidence we must pause at times to take stock of its particular quality. It obviously makes a considerable difference whether your information is contained in historical writings, in oratory or poetry, or in official documents, such as inscriptions and coins.

Such stocktaking is particularly essential in the case of the Roman Imperial coins; for, while they obviously have a message for the historian, it is not quite like any other message that he is called upon to decipher. It is only after nearly forty years of study that I seem to be able to focus them correctly and to see the broad facts as distinct from the countless problems of detail—in short, to distinguish the wood from the trees.

The Roman Imperial coinage attends the Empire during its whole course, reign by reign. It can usually be dated closely—often to a single year. It can usually be assigned with confidence to its mints, of which the capital, Rome, is naturally the chief. It provides us with a marvellous gallery of portraits, with the fullest possible record of the different styles and legends of the Emperors, with pregnant references to events, familiar in history, and with a steady commentary on those events and the policies centred on them. Above all, it is continuous. It takes us out of set periods and keeps us in touch with the Empire along its whole course, and it is the only surviving source that does so. Therein lies its great, its unique, value for the student.

The Roman coins obviously serve purposes beyond those of a mere medium of exchange. They are used in fact for publicity and propaganda. The first question we have to ask—and, if possible, answer—is this: were the authorities fully aware of these extra functions of coinage, and, if so, how seriously did they regard them?

The answer is quite definite and sure. The authorities were fully aware of them and regarded them with deep seriousness. The more one studies the Imperial coinage, the more convinced does one become of its essential earnestness. Publicity was not so readily attained by an age that had no cheap press and no radio. Propaganda is always important, and for propaganda publicity is necessary. The coin was issued steadily and passed freely from hand to hand. When the types were not fixed for long periods, but changed from year



to year, men must have spent some little time in studying the coins which they carried in their pockets. They might even do so today, if we began to treat our coinage in the old—the medallic—way.

Every new Emperor was quick to make his features and titles familiar to his world. He carefully selected those events on which he wished the public to dwell, and adroitly suggested the interpretations which were to be placed upon them. If we attempt to find meanings in types of a character, seemingly general and colourless, we may be guilty of an occasional mistake of false emphasis. But we are certain to err more seriously, if, because of this risk, we neglect the task of interpretation altogether. In his stock of symbolical types—gods, virtues, buildings, animate and inanimate objects—the Roman mint-master had an instrument ready to his hand which could be applied to every changing occasion. Descriptive legends could be brought in to make the meaning more precise. Especially could the virtues of an emperor be used to paint a picture of the policy of a reign. By honouring the spirits that inspire an emperor you make plain the principles on which he is preparing to govern.

Let no one imagine that coin types were selected haphazard—that the particular choice of events to be illustrated and of the colours in which to paint them was left to subordinate officials of the mint. If we ask at what level the main decisions about the work of the mint was taken the coinage itself supplies a ready answer. It must have been at a very high one. No emperor who took his duties seriously can have failed to give very serious thought to the messages that his coinage was to carry abroad into the world. If he was so neglectful, he was allowing a most powerful weapon of propaganda to slip out of his own hands into the hands of others who might use it to his disadvantage. Trajan, when he handed the dagger of office to his praetorian prefect, bade him use it "for me, if I deserve it; if not, against me!" The Emperor who gave his mint-master a free hand with the

coinage would have been practising a similar self-denial, with far less sound reason or justification. Some Emperors, no doubt, *did* leave it to subordinates to make important decisions for them. But, with the mint, the neglect certainly never went very far down. It would be hard to point to any one period in the Empire when subordinate officials were left free to interpret in the coinage the intentions of the Government.

The coins of the Empire fall into two main series: the gold and silver issued by the Emperor, and the bronze and copper—subordinate token coinage—issued by the Senate. The mark of senatorial control (S.C.—*Senatus Consulto*) is as normally present on the token coinage as it is absent from the precious metals. But it is becoming every day more plain that the distinction is rather one of form than of final intention. The Emperor elected to give his arrangements for the token coinage the stamp of official approval in the Senate, but he never let the control of it pass out of his own hands. That is why we find such coinage with the mark S.C. even in imperial provinces like Gaul or Syria. It is quite inconceivable that the Emperor should have risked having propaganda, in a sense contrary to his own, put abroad by an independent Senate. It would have been seriously confusing to the public, and it might so easily have become dangerous to the Emperor himself. For, while the Empire could be seen to bear the stamp of eternity, the individual Emperor and dynasty were subject to the vicissitudes of fortune. There was indeed a dyarchy of a kind, a dual government by Emperor and by Senate. But the distinction was really no more than that of two ways in which the Emperor could proceed, with his self-chosen advisers, or in partnership with the Senate as representative of the Roman State—S.P.Q.R. (*Senatus populusque Romanus*). The only business transacted by the Senate alone was of subordinate importance.

To whom were the messages of the Imperial coinage addressed? And in what capacity did the Emperor address them? Nominally, of course, to the whole world, to the subjects of the Empire at large, as becomes evident when we hear of the *Salus generis humani* or the *Restitutor orbis terrarum*. Sometimes the message is directed to a particular section—senate, knights, people, army or provinces. But as a general rule we have to think of the *populus Romanus*, the great body of Roman citizens, as the audience in view, and in particular of the Roman citizens assembled in the city of Rome. We do not always appraise at its true value the importance of the Roman mob in its corporate capacity. The Empire, once founded, must continue to stand, for there was really no possible alternative. But while the Empire remained, Emperors might come and go. An Emperor must be sure where he stood. The first requirement was the support of the army—in particular of the praetorians of Rome. Hardly second in importance was the approval of the Senate, which alone could make Empire constitutional. But, however true it is that a government stands by force and constitutional precedent, it will always need the backing of public opinion if it is to enjoy any ease or security. Individually the Roman citizen had little power or freedom left him. He was quite at the mercy of an irrepressible autocracy if he chose to cross its path. But when he assembled in his myriads in amphitheatre or circus, or to cheer the Emperor on his arrivals and departures, he could express collectively what he dared not say individually. It was extremely dangerous for an Emperor to allow such public demonstrations to remain consistently unfriendly, and it was far from safe to suppress them by violence. Disapproval of the Emperor expressed in public gatherings might well be the prelude to his fall. Discontent might spread from those who could not give immediate effect to it to those who could—to the praetorian guard or the provincial armies. The course of obvious wisdom was to make full use of conciliation and material inducements to ensure that the vote of Rome, the central constituency of the Empire, should be heard in support of, not in denunciation of, its lawful ruler. Septimius Severus was seriously worried when the crowds in the amphitheatre greeted him on his return from

the East to fight his rival Albinus, with cries of "How long are we to be treated like this? How long are we to be kept at war?" And there is one more point. We often think of the mob of Rome as mercenary and servile—and not without justice. But we need also to think of the sounder elements, the *populus integer* as Tacitus calls them, which could often evince their independence and courage. The Roman masses sometimes showed a surprising tenderness—as when they protested, under Nero, against the execution of the savage rule that, when a master was killed, all slaves present on the premises at the time were liable to the death penalty—and an equally surprising courage, as when they, unlike the cringing Senate, disdained the threats and bribes of Didius Julianus and called on the provincial armies and their generals to vindicate the majesty of Rome, insulted by an Emperor who condoned the lawless murder of his predecessor and bought the Empire at infamous auction.

On the coinage, then, the Emperor spoke with set purpose to his subjects. It was not, of course, his only means of communication with them. He might deal with them individually, through the petitions bureau, the *"A libellis"*, or collectively by edicts. There were also the *"Acta Diurna"*, a short summary of events, officially edited, and the *"Acta Senatus"*, which, like Hansard, will only have interested a small and rather special public. But all these other forms have vanished, leaving barely a trace. The coins survive intact.

In what capacity would the Emperor speak to his Romans? He had so many parts to play that it is often difficult to decide in what particular guise he is appearing on any one occasion. To the army he was "Imperator", Commander-in-Chief. To the Senate he was "Chief", chief citizen (*princeps*) and chief Senator (*princeps senatus*). To the provincials he was the great ruler, with a power more than regal, though officially he lacked the name of king; the Greek East found no difficulty in calling him *βασιλεύς*. To the flatterers and to some honest, simple-minded people he



was a god. To his slaves and freedmen, and again to some servile folk, he was lord and master. To the Roman people he, as holder of the tribunician power, was their traditional representative and protector. In religion he was *pontifex maximus*, chief priest. But we have still to find some more general conception, in which all these aspects may be summed up. *Imperator, tribunicia potestate, pontifex maximus*, all describe some facets of the Emperor's power, but he remains, in all the uniqueness of his position, one. The Romans tried to express this when they described him, unofficially, as *princeps*, No. I in the State, or, officially, as *Augustus*, "the revered"—a title not actually of a god, but bordering on the divine sphere.

The Emperor possesses, by common consent, a unique power of initiative, *auctoritas*, based on his character, his descent and his position in Rome. Men always look to him to give them the lead. He is the one powerful man in front of a mass of humble subordinates. This relationship could find a tenderer expression in that of a father to his children, peculiarly agreeable to the Roman mind, with its immense veneration for the *patria potestas*. Augustus, after many years of rule, was acclaimed in the Senate "Father of his country", and he regarded this honour as the very crown of his career. Succeeding Emperors usually received the title, sometimes deferred for a time, until they had "earned" it. With the idea of fatherhood was bound up that of "saviour of the country", expressed by the type of the civic oak-wreath, with the legend "SPQR PP OB CIVES SERVATOS". The wreath had originally been given as a kind of Victoria Cross, a reward of valour for the soldier who saved a comrade's life in action. Now the father-emperor "saved" in a wider sense—sometimes, as was once cynically remarked, by not taking the lives that lay in his hands.

But, while the thought of the fatherhood of the Emperor was always somewhere in the background, ready to be called into application at need, there was another interpretation,

always possible, on which it could be grafted. The Emperor was the *patronus,* the man of influence, might and wealth, who extended his protection, his *fides,* to the mass of small men who were his "clients". These "clients", the Roman people, gave him their own *fides,* their loyalty and service, in return. *Fides* is one of those two-way Roman words that cannot be rendered by any single word in English. The idea of good faith is always at its root, but the shade of meaning is determined by the quality of the person to whom it is applied.

The relationship of patron to client goes right back to the beginnings of Roman history. The patricians of the early Republic, in their fight with the plebs, depended on the support of the many clients whose interests were bound up with their own. The relationship is not so much to the fore in the later history, but we should do wrong to assume that it had lost its validity, because its immediate influence in politics is not so obvious. In the civil wars between Antony and Octavian there were Italian cities in the *clientela* of Antony that asked, for that reason, to be left out of the *coniuratio,* the solemn covenant sworn by Italy against him, and Octavian did not attempt to coerce them. The relation between patron and client was regarded as very close and very sacred, not far behind that of father and son. To wrong a client was a grave offence against *pietas,* right conduct. Duty to a client ranked above all except those to the nearest of kin. The Romans, in fact, found it natural to bridge social gulfs by this convenient relationship and to consecrate it by the most solemn symbols and associations. Under the Empire, it is true, the client might seem to have sunk to a very mean position. In Martial, the Roman writer of epigrams, he seems to be doomed to render petty services for trivial payments. But the reason for this is not far to seek. The relationship of patron and client was by no means forgotten, but it was now the Emperor who was the great patron, before whose splendour all lesser greatness paled, and the whole Roman people were his clients. He was not disposed to tolerate any too powerful patrons beside himself.



It is as patron to clients, then, that the Emperor speaks to his Romans, and of all the many forms in which he addressed them the coins are the only ones that have survived, in anything but fragments, today. The coins give us something like a continuous series of addresses by the Emperor to his clients. To understand them we have to realise the character and condition of the Emperor who issued them. We have also to imagine for ourselves the kind of needs and wishes that were met by them; the sort of response that they evoked. In a little book entitled "The Man in the Roman Street" I have tried to picture the quality of the minds to which they were addressed. But we have still more to do if we are to understand them aright. We have to learn how to expand them and recover from them something of the fuller form, which they in their shorthand represent. The coins, we may suppose, show the Emperor accompanied by Valour and crowned by Victory, sacrificing in front of a temple. This must be expanded in some way like this: "Since, by the power of valour in him, the Emperor has triumphed over the national enemy, he is now paying his vows, on behalf of himself and the State, to the gods who preserve the Empire". In a similar way we have to expand the types themselves, to catch from the coins some glimpses of that world of larger art, which, except for rare survivals, has vanished. We have to imagine for ourselves the arches, the temples, the altars, the great groups of statuary or painting, of which all record would have been lost if the Roman Government had not had the foresight to insert short mention of them in the Imperial coinage. The few that actually survive will help us to reconstruct the many that were lost.

Out of the immense field that opens up before us—nothing less than the survey, under a particular aspect, of the whole of Roman Imperial history—we can obviously only select a few items for full discussion tonight. First and foremost come the *panis et circenses* (bread and the circus-races), which, according to the Roman satirist Juvenal, were all that the Roman people, once arbiter of peace and war, any longer

cared for. Bread was a very near concern of the whole Roman people. The poor received their corn, issued free on ticket. But all classes wanted corn to be plentiful and cheap, and Rome, even assisted by Italy, was no more able to support herself. The overseas provinces—Africa and Egypt foremost, in a lesser degree Sicily and Sardinia—were regularly called upon for aid; and the Emperor maintained great corn-fleets to deliver the precious cargoes to the Italian ports. Prolonged bad weather might bring Rome near famine; for no great supplies were regularly stored. Nothing could so quickly render an Emperor unpopular as a failure of the corn supply. Claudius on one such occasion was pelted with crusts by an angry mob. The Emperors, therefore, strained every nerve to maintain a cheap and regular supply, and were never tired of advertising their efforts on the coins. They showed the corn goddess Ceres and her attendant spirit Annona; or Annona holding a statuette of Aequitas, the goddess of right measure; or Annona with the lighthouse of Alexandria beside her; or Annona with a captain, *navicularius*, in front of her. When the corn supply from Egypt was being cut off by Vespasian, Vitellius had himself represented in arms in its defence. Nero placed on his coins a plan of the port of Ostia, rebuilt by himself and Claudius. Commodus, who built a new African corn-fleet, celebrates his "providence" by types of merchant ship and of himself as Hercules, greeted by Africa, who wears her elephant's skin headdress. The *modius* (corn-basket) of Nerva commemorates special arrangements that he made for the supply of corn to the Roman plebs. Hadrian's legend, *Tellus Stabilita*, with agricultural types, speaks in more general terms of the setting of agriculture throughout the Empire on a sure basis.

The supply of bread was not the only material favour that the Emperor conferred on the Romans. At accession, and on special occasions of rejoicing, at intervals throughout his reign, he would make a present of money—usually about seventy-five denarii (£3)—to all Romans. Such occasions were normally advertised on the coinage, either by the type of the goddess Liberalitas, holding her account-board and her horn of plenty, or by the scene of distribution, with the Emperor himself presiding over the beginning of the largesse. These bounties were not as unwarranted and demoralising as they might at first appear; they tended to encourage, and were meant to encourage, the rearing of larger families, the *Spes P.R.*, or hope of the race, to use the Roman phrase. Nerva and Trajan were the first to make special arrangements for orphan children out of the income derived from estates, mortgaged to Italian farmers. These *Alimenta Italiae* were celebrated by Trajan with the type of mother and child before the Emperor throned, or of the Emperor standing with his wards before him. A sestertius of Hadrian, showing the former of those two types, but with legend *Libertas restituta*, may refer to the same occasion; for the conception of "liberty" under the Empire was an odd one—it might mean the right to receive Imperial favours as a citizen—and the Romans, ever fond of puns, often made play with the three words *Libertas*, *Liberalitas* and *Liberi* (children). Antoninus Pius, in honour of his wife Faustina the Elder, who was consecrated after her death in A.D. 140, founded the *puellae Faustinianae* (the girls of Faustina) in her honour. A fine aureus in the British Museum shows the Emperor dictating the charter to his secretary, behind whom is Faustina, leaning forward to advise; on a lower register stand the children and their nurses. At other times the Imperial indulgence took the form of a relief of burdens, such as the lifting of the expenses of the Imperial post from Italy, or the burning of bonds of old debts by a lictor in the forum under Hadrian. As benefactor in general the Emperor might be acclaimed as *restitutor* (restorer), with his protegée, a province or the whole world, kneeling before him waiting to be raised to her feet.



After material benefits come popular amusements, *circenses* after *panis*. The races in the circus themselves, a mad passion of Imperial Rome, which divided into furious factions over them, never appear on the coins, though they are freely celebrated by racehorses and their riders on the round

coin-like discs with turned-up edges, the "contorniates" of the fourth and fifth centuries. The Circus Maximus itself is shown on sestertii of Trajan, Caracalla and Gordian III and on an aureus of Septimius Severus — all four of them Emperors who improved or rebuilt it. The Colosseum, the gigantic creation of Vespasian and Titus, appears once on a sestertius of the latter ruler. The gladiatorial shows, that terrible passion of the Roman mob, are never mentioned on the coins. A decent reticence seems to forbid a public advertisement of an amusement of which many Romans were secretly ashamed, though they might think it necessary to maintain Roman valour. Wild beast shows were more liberally treated. Domitian, the first to exhibit a rhinoceros in Rome, placed it on a bronze coin. Antoninus Pius similarly showed an elephant, a much more familiar beast, but one particularly reserved for Imperial use. In A.D. 248, on the thousandth anniversary of Rome, Philip I exhibited for the public delight a whole series of beasts—lion, hippopotamus, goat, stag, elk, antelope—not omitting the she-wolf and twins—the latter presumably in effigy. Septimius and Caracalla contrived a wonderful ship, the sides of which suddenly opened and discharged a string of beasts—lions, tigers, bulls, ostriches, etc. With these shows we may perhaps class the Roman triumph, the great parade at which the victorious Roman general, accompanied by cheering soldiers, led his captives through the streets of Rome to the temple of Jupiter, Best and Greatest. General references to public merry-making, *Laetitia* or *Hilaritas,* were frequent. Rome had become a vast pleasure resort. The number of days devoted every year to games and festivals, in honour of the gods and in celebration of victories and anniversaries, was continually increasing until it added up to something near one in two. The pampered people of Rome enjoyed not only cheap victuals, but amusement free of cost at the expense of the rest of the world. The Emperor as giver of shows was naturally popular. It was not everyone who would stop to reflect that he need not be grateful to the particular giver, as every successor would have to do the



same. But it was not a noble side of Roman civilisation. The finer artistic pleasures were not well catered for. The legitimate theatre was in decline, while vulgar displays of mime and pantomime ever gained at its expense. Athletic games were never popular in Rome. The desperate excitements of the dangerous races in the circus, the blood lust of the arena degraded and cloyed the Roman taste.

Like most potentates of all times, the Emperors were great builders. As we have seen, they created the Colosseum and restored the Circus; they dedicated new temples to the gods and repaired the old. They commemorated their victories by triumphal arches and columns. They beautified the city with many a forum and basilica. Many such buildings are recorded on coins, and in some cases the coin record is absolutely all that survives to give us an idea of lost greatness. Let us glance at a few that are thus recorded: the forum and column of Trajan, the Basilica Ulpia of the same Emperor, the arch of Trajan, the temple of Concord, the temple of Divus Augustus, the temple of Peace and many more. Trajan, in particular, was never weary of building; when he had nothing new to make, he restored other men's work. The wits said that his name was like the weed that grows everywhere on walls. The Colossus which stood in front of the Golden House, showing Nero as sun-god, was transferred to a new site by Titus; it is represented on a coin of the latter. Rome had always been famous for her aqueducts, and the Emperors Claudius and Trajan constructed new ones. Trajan represented his by a figure reclining on a rock, resting his elbow on an urn. The public roads of Italy were another pride of the Romans. Augustus had repaired them at his own expense, and Trajan added a new one, the Via Traiana, and represented it by a figure reclining on a rock and holding a wheel. Nerva, as we have seen, took the burden of the state-post in Italy on to the shoulders of his fiscus.

Many imperial occasions were made excuses for pageantry. The arrivals and departures of the Emperor were celebrated with much pomp and display. Crowds would

assemble along the route and throw flowers, while the Emperor on horseback acknowledged their plaudits by raising his right hand. Symbolically, arrival and departure were represented by types of the Emperor riding, with or without attendant soldiers; arrival could also be represented by Rome welcoming the Emperor or presenting him to the Senate, or by Fortuna, the Home-bringer, greeting him. There would also be occasions when the Emperor would harangue his people; one such is represented on a sestertius of Hadrian. The Emperor stands on the *rostra* in front of a temple, and both he and the crowd raise their right hands.

Somewhere between pure religion and public entertainments come the *Ludi Saeculares,* an old festival of Etruscan origin, of purification and thanksgiving at the end of one age and the beginning of another. The age was reckoned at one hundred and ten years, a little beyond the extreme term of human life. Actually, the games were held at rather irregular intervals—in 17 B.C. by Augustus, in A.D. 88 by Domitian, in A.D. 204 by Septimius Severus. The games so celebrated by Claudius in A.D. 47-8 were really of a different order, as they commemorated the eight-hundredth year of Rome. So, too, Antoninus Pius celebrated the nine-hundredth year and Philip I the thousandth. The games of Augustus, Domitian, and Septimius Severus were all recorded on the coins, so fully, in their sum, that almost every feature finds illustration. Augustus showed the herald who called the people to games that "no living man had seen or would see again", and the issue of purifying elements (*suffimenta*) to the people. Domitian, on a fine series of sestertii, represented the Emperor receiving the gifts of natural produce (*fruges*) from the people, the prayer to Juno, dictated by him to the kneeling matrons, the procession of boys and girls singing the hymn to Apollo and Diana, the nocturnal sacrifices to Mother Earth and the goddesses of birth. Septimius Severus made a special place of honour for Hercules and Liber (Bacchus), the chief deities of his native city, Leptis Magna; he regarded them as his *di auspices,* who prompted and blessed all his endeavours.



His coin type shows them standing side by side. They must have had a large place in the hymn of his year; but, alas, only inconsiderable fragments of it survive.

Religion played a great part in the public life of the Romans, who were regarded by the ancient world as "the most religious of peoples". Interest in religion had undoubtedly declined in the general decay of the Roman Republic, but there was a definite revival, partly spontaneous, partly helped by Augustus, at the beginning of the Empire. As time went on, interest in religion grew rather than declined. The third century, to say nothing of the fourth, was certainly an age of faith. The religious direction shifted as Eastern cults pressed in beside the old Roman and Greek, but the spirit was still the same. More and more the Emperor emphasised his own position as Chief Priest and the parts played by his wife and children in the official religion. Men obviously felt that the continued welfare of Rome depended not only on the valour and initiative of its own Emperors, but even more on their *pietas,* their correct performance of the rights due to the gods of the State. The gods come more and more to be associated with the person of the Emperor and his family, as their patterns, their companions and their preservers (*comites, conservatores*). If you ever have any doubt of the persistence of ancient religion, if you have been led to suppose that paganism was moribund at the beginning of our era, study the series of Imperial coins. They are full of references to the gods and their worship, their temples and their altars. There is no possibility of hypocrisy or deception here. The emperors spoke in that language because it was the one that appealed directly to the hearts of their subjects.

There are two features of imperial religion that deserve special attention—the imperial vows and the worship of the deified emperors. The prayer most natural to the Roman was the vow (*votum*), a petition for a favour accompanied by a promise to pay for it by sacrifice when granted. Such prayers were being continually undertaken and paid (*suscepta* and *soluta*) by private individuals. They also formed the

main part of the religious life of the community. On January 3rd in each year, the day of the vows (*votis*), vows were undertaken for the safety of the Emperor and his people. They were repeated, with special emphasis and impressive ceremony, at the end of longer terms of five or ten years (*vota quinquennalia* and *decennalia*) and with them were associated great public rejoicing and games, and often special imperial favours or announcements of policy. There would also be vows for such occasions as the departure of the Emperor and births or weddings in the Imperial family. The most common type of the vows is that of the Emperor sacrificing, dropping a few grains of incense on the altar when he formulates (*nuncupat*) his vows, but with patera in hand and *victimarius* and victim at his side as he pays them. The Emperor is, of course, only the focal point of a large and impressive scene, some details of which are occasionally shown on the coins—officers in attendance, harpists and flute-players and temple in the background. Sometimes it is the Roman State that is represented in sacrifice—the *Genius* of the Senate, an old man wearing the toga and carrying a sceptre, and the *Genius* of the Roman people, a young man bare to the waist, holding the horn of plenty. Other types, such as *Genius* or *Salus,* were often, though not invariably, associated with the vows.

The ancient East had always worshipped its rulers, or at least had placed them very near the gods. The habit had been generally adopted by the Greeks, after Alexander the Great. The Successor Kings were commonly honoured as "Saviours", "Benefactors", "Gods" or "Gods Manifest". The boundary line between human and divine was well-nigh obliterated. Either the view was taken that deity was something that man could attain by conspicuous merit or service, as Hercules, Bacchus, Castor and Pollux had once attained it. According to one writer, Euhemerus, all the gods, even Jupiter himself, had once been great kings, who had ruled in power and glory on earth and after death had won Heaven by their virtues. Or else the divine element in the soul of the outstanding



individual was recognized by worship of the divine powers and energies ("the Virtues") that find expression in him. What view was to be taken of the Roman Emperor, so great in fact, so beneficent in men's faith and hope? The Romans had learned about the deification of men from the Greek East, which had insisted on worshipping the "Virtues" of its governors. Lucky it if it could find them! But the Roman had a rooted objection to the direct worship of a man as god: it offended his dignity and his common sense. But he was accustomed to regard all the dead as in some sense divine (*di manes*), and so a compromise was reached, by which Roman susceptibilities could be respected and yet due heed could be paid to the unique position of the Emperor. Outside Rome the Emperor was worshipped, even in his lifetime, as a god; in Rome, worship was only paid to his spirit (*Genius*) and his Virtues. But, once dead, if his memory was blessed by the Senate, he was consecrated, admitted to the heaven of the stars as a god (*Divus*) and honoured with a special guild of priests, a high priest or *Flamen* at their head, with altars, statues and temples. If the judgment of the Senate was unfavourable, the Emperor's acts were annulled and he was, so to speak, sent to Hell. In a few cases, the question of merit was left undecided and the Emperor remained in a sort of limbo. Not only emperors, but their near relatives—wives, fathers, sons and daughters—might be consecrated, and a new Pantheon of imperial deities came into being. This cult might prove a rallying point for imperial loyalty. Trajan Decius made it the centre of his pagan reaction, which aimed at restoring Roman valour, but which involved, as one of its consequences, the first persecution general of the Christian Church.

The *Divus* was translated from earth to Heaven. The eagle might be the symbol of his ascent, or it might actually bear him aloft. The coins show the figures of the *Divi* and *Divae,* the priests, altars and temples of their cult, the funeral pyre at which the eagle was liberated, the sacred throne (*pulvinar*) on which their attributes were set out, the image,

borne on a car of elephants in the great public parade of the circus (*pompa circensis*). Immortality was usually associated with the upper air and the stars. A star might symbolise a new god, or he might be shown throned in heavenly majesty. Faustina the Younger is represented seated among the dancing Hours, or driving, like the moon-goddess, in her nightly chariot (*Sideribus Recepta*). The Roman people were familiar with this world of thought and symbolism and were constantly being reminded of it on the coins. Vows were paid to the *Divi,* and some simple souls seem actually to have believed that they were cosmic powers, capable of influencing the physical world. Poets and artists strained their ingenuity to elaborate the theme. Statius, a court poet of Domitian, pictures the stars of the Flavian heaven playing by night on the head of Domitian on his great equestrian statue in the Forum. Even hard-headed men of affairs, like the elder Pliny, accepted the idea of consecration as the substance of a plain truth—that the Emperor who rightly performed his duty of helping his fellow men thereby passed out of the ranks of ordinary mortals, whose memory dies with them. With the coming of Christianity the worship of the god-man had to go, though traces of it lingered on to the death of Theodosius the Great. But the old sentiment found new forms. The Christian Emperor was venerated as the chosen of God, crowned by His hand. His passing might be likened to that of Elijah, caught up to Heaven in the chariot of fire. The form has changed, but the feeling abides.

There were, as we have seen, occasions when the Emperor addressed his appeals to particular classes—to the Senate, to the knights, or to the Roman people—praising his concord with the Senate, linking his heir as "prince of the youth" to the knights, promising favours to the Roman people. Occasionally, too, he spoke directly to his provinces or even to the whole Roman world. But there was one class that stood in a very special relation to the Emperor, and that was the Roman army. The Roman legionaries were, of course, Roman citizens and, as such, members of the general body of



imperial clients. But, as soldiers, they entered into a special bond with the Emperor, which ranked even higher than that of client and patron. They swore allegiance directly to him ("swore into his words", as the Romans put it), hailed him as Emperor (*Imperator*), and entered into the special relationship of military loyalty to him. In return for their allegiance they received their pay—which rose at intervals through the Empire—their pensions on discharge, their military decorations, their special privileges and, perhaps most important of all, the exceptional gift, the donative, given at accession and other rare occasions. The army was too important a part of the State to be kept out of the public records. Victories in the field were freely celebrated. Appeals were often made to the "Harmony and Loyalty" (*Concordia* and *Fides*) of the troops. Be it noted that the emphasis on these desirable qualities often cloaked secret misgivings. *Fides Militum* might almost be described as the watchword of the terrible military anarchy of the third century, when Emperor after Emperor was murdered by his "faithful comrades". The Emperor is often shown haranguing his men, leading them into the field or receiving their plaudits as victor. But the peculiar relation of the Emperor to his troops was always kept as one of the Imperial secrets, the *arcana imperii* — if not an absolute mystery, at least one of the things about which you did not talk a great deal in public. The donatives, to take a special case, were never recorded on the coins; largesses to the people invariably, donatives never. Emperors from Septimius Severus onwards seem to have met these special and heavy charges out of their Private Fund, the *Res privata.* That was what Septimius meant on his deathbed when he exhorted his sons "to be of one mind with one another, to enrich the soldiers, and to despise the rest of the world"! It was out of confiscations that the Private Fund was mainly fed. There were two reasons for this unwillingness to advertise a necessity of empire which, while naturally acceptable to the soldiers, could be very irksome to the Emperor who had to find the money. One was that the giving of donatives was

part of the confidential relationship of the commander-in-chief with his men, a private matter between him and them. Even under the Republic the general had enjoyed considerable independence in fixing the rewards of his troops; it was only after deducting them from the yield of the spoils (*manubiae*) that he rendered account to the State of his receipts and expenses. The other reason was their extravagant scale. Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus actually gave 20,000 sesterii (about £200) to each praetorian. Didius Julianus, who bought the empire at auction, gave 25,000 sestertii (£250). The legionaries got their share, perhaps half that of the praetorians. This scale, so vastly above that of the largesse of about 300 sestertii (£3) a head, was likely to provoke bitter comment if advertised. It was enough if the burden was recognised as a bitter necessity and left as such. In the last resort, the Empire rested on force; only the master of the guard and legions could hold it. The undeniable fact was too awkward and painful to reveal in all its nakedness. To do so would have been to expose the Empire as a military autocracy, subject to no constitutional law and liable to be transferred at any moment by military revolution. The merciful mask drawn over the ugly reality had its uses; the Empire could be made to look constitutional and, in seeming to be so, it might almost become so.

Of foreign policy the Emperor only talked to his clients now and then. Such high matters of state were usually reserved for him and his intimate advisers; the Senate was often called in to discuss, seldom to decide. Some events of interest and importance were deliberately brought to the public notice by coin-types. Such were the investiture of kings (*Rex Parthis Datus; Regna Adsignata; Rex Quadis Datus*) or the defeat and surrender of a province (*Iudaea Capta; Germania Capta; Dacia Capta*). It was the dazzling successes in particular that were advertised, successes that might seem to justify the vast labour and expense of wars. And still the triumph, now celebrated only by the Emperor or his sons, brought before the eyes of the Romans the detailed story of victory and conquest.



The Romans were acutely aware of the duality of life, of the material world, immediate, visible and tangible, and of the spiritual world, remoter, out of sight or touch, but none the less real. His imagination roamed freely between the two. But we must not make the mistake of supposing that "spiritual", in this context, implies anything vague or shadowy on the one hand or particularly good on the other. The supernatural was just the other side of the natural and, like it, contained elements of very diverse qualities. They were like the obverse and reverse of the same coin. As regards reality the spiritual world was more real than the material world, in the sense that in it the "numina", the acts of divine will that make the world go round, have their being.

The Emperor, in his conversations with his clients, did not neglect this vital aspect of things. Of the forms of religion we have already had something to say; we must now speak about their content. It is mainly as the preservers of the Roman State and its Emperor that the gods are honoured. They can be cited as types of the Emperor in his various capacities. Jupiter represents him as lord and ruler, Mars as the warrior in arms, Hercules as the heroic toiler for mankind. Juno stands for the Empress, Minerva, vice-regent of Jupiter, for the prince. In this way, the activities of the great on earth could be set in a larger frame, be translated, so to speak, from time into eternity. Only thus could the Roman world be felt to be firmly established. Zosimus, recording the sack of Rome by Alaric the Goth and the payment of his ransom, laments that the Romans were driven to melt down the images of those powers that had been honoured for their services in maintaining and prospering the Empire—among them that of the goddess whom the Romans called "Virtus". And then, he continues, all that was still left of courage and worth in Rome was quenched, as the masters of secret wisdom had long ago predicted. Virtus (equals Ῥώμη, Roma) must have been in a special sense the tutelary deity of the City. But all the gods

have something of the same talismanic character. It is amazing to find that their images had survived in Rome so long into the Christian Empire.

Even more flexible and useful for propaganda was the world of the "Virtues" — deities of the old Roman type, deities of pure function, without mythology, but capable of receiving worship. The *Virtus* exists, but where? Probably we should say in just those activities that make up her being. The Virtues might be appealed to in their general character, as *Pax, Felicitas, Concordia* or *Salus.* But they might also be associated with special occasions and persons, and, particularly in the latter case, the Virtue is felt to be a divine power, finding expression in the person through whom she acts. The Romans, before ever they built a temple to Julius Caesar himself, worshipped his Mercy (*Clementia*). The Emperor, by this worship of divine powers inherent in him, could be brought very near to the divine world. His character, policy and achievements could be expressed with much precision by the same device. For the Virtue of an Emperor is not just a quality of state of mind; it is an active power, a *numen.* Thus *Pax Augusti* is a definite power, which makes the Emperor a bringer of the Roman, the Augustan peace to the world. *Felicitas Augusti* certainly confers blessedness on the Emperor himself, but she also flows out from him to make others blessed. *Sis felix nostrumque leves, quaecumque, laborem,* as Virgil in the *Aeneid* makes Aeneas say to his mother when she meets him disguised as a nymph.

The Virtues may be arranged in groups, covering the whole of life. War is under *Victoria* and *Honos* and *Virtus,* the patron deities of the army. Unless the Emperor is brave and valiant, he will not be Emperor for long. The Emperor Trajan, when he interrogated Ignatius and learned that he claimed to bear Christ in him, asked: "And do you not believe that I have powers in me that give me victory over my enemies?" What he meant was *Victoria Augusti* and *Virtus Augusti. Pax* and *Felicitas* are concerned with peace and the prosperity that goes with it, and not far from them stand



*Salus* and *Securitas,* salvation and peace of mind. Other Virtues are related to governmental departments—*Abundantia, Aequitas, Annona* and *Uberitas* to the Emperor's wealth of supply, *Moneta* to his mint. Others define the quality of an Emperor's government—*Clementia, Indulgentia, Iustitia, Libertas,* and *Tranquillitas. Liberalitas* and *Munificentia* inspire largesses and games, *Hilaritas* and *Laetitia* occasions of public rejoicing and merry-making. Fortune is the "Luck of Empire". *Genius* and *Bonus Eventus* both relate to the personality of the Emperor; occasionally, Juno, as feminine of Genius, is found for the Empress. *Concordia* is equally at home in the State and in the Imperial family; so, too, is *Pudicitia,* which can mean sacred purity as well as personal chastity. *Fides* is a virtue that pervades life, everywhere confirming and establishing the ties by which a social system is held together. The great religious Virtue is *Pietas,* "Goodness", right conduct towards the gods or one's kindred or one's fellow men. *Pietas* to an enemy becomes almost our modern "pity".

The world of the Virtues was not closed, but could be expanded from time to time to meet new needs and express new desires. We have already spoken of the *Genius* or spirit of the Senate. Other *Genii*—of Roman people and army or of city—express the spiritual reality behind the material. The provinces, too, had their representations in human form; but though, like the gods and Virtues, they may bear distinguishing attributes, they probably did not normally receive cult and were not unlike our modern personifications—expressions of ideas in artistic and poetic form without much vitality. But the Virtues were alive, were powers like the Virtues in Milton's angelic orders, "Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers!" They were firmly conceived of; they had their distinguishing symbols. They were rooted in the soil of popular belief.

Finally, we may glance at a few wider conceptions, which might be built up out of a linked series of types and which an Emperor might wish to present emphatically to his subjects.

One such conception is that of *Aeternitas*, the eternity of Rome, with which the eternity of the Imperial house is bound up, linked to the permanency of the natural order. Sun and moon are its natural symbols, or the phoenix, the bird reborn out of its own ashes. Present, past and future are bound together in an harmonious whole. But interest in the future was feeble compared with interest in the present and the past. There was no general ideal of progress: the Romans hardly had a word for the idea. The characteristic thought of the present is that of the ideal state, the *optimus status rerum*, ensured by an *optimus princeps*, endowed with the virtues necessary to produce it. Every reign that had time to define its programme tried to restate this theme of the *optimus status rerum* in new terms. But the present was firmly rooted in the past. The Romans had a deep respect for tradition, for the *mos maiorum*, and were not guilty of the modern heresy of imagining themselves "self-made". Right behind recorded history lay the Golden Age of myth—the Age of the old king Saturn in Latium or of the baby Jupiter in Crete—when Justice (*Astraea*) ruled the world, not yet driven away by men's sins, and the earth gave freely of her fruits to the holy race that reaped them. There was ever the dream, the hope that the ancient bliss could be restored, and Emperor after Emperor claims to be restoring that pristine virtue, happiness and plenty. Actually, you had to find your Golden Age in whatever the Emperor chanced to offer you. A Christian writer of the third century murmured in bitterness that the Golden Age was Iron in their experience. Still the theme persists; and, though definite reference to it, as on a well-known aureus of Hadrian, is very rare, it underlies the formula that so often occurs of *Felicitas saeculi, Felicitas temporum*. The *Fel. Temp. Reparatio*, the slogan of Constantius II and Constans for the eleven-hundredth year of Rome, moves in the same field of thought. Or, again, attention may be directed to the foundation of Rome, to Romulus the founder, or to the she-wolf and twins of legend; men may be invited to believe that Rome under its good Emperor is experiencing a new birth.



Here one must break off and cease to pursue a subject that seems to unfold itself unceasingly before us. I hope I have succeeded in convincing you that we can form some good general ideas of the imperial government and its subjects, and of the forms of thought that they shared in common, as also of the suggestions that were conveyed in those forms from governor to governed. The coins have been our chief guide; but their function is not only to deliver their own brief message, but to give us clues by which we may interpret much larger bodies of ancient evidence. I trust that our study has been of interest. I would plead that it is more than a curious piece of antiquarianism. It has a quite definite meaning for the present. In trying to realize the world of thought in which an ancient civilisation moved, we are led to compare it or contrast it with our own, and thus are enabled to realise with a new clearness what life means to a civilised society of today.*

* The ancient material, on which this paper draws, will be mainly found in the Catalogues of the Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum and the Bibliographies appended to them.