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TURNUS: A DIACHRONIC HERO

By

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B.A., University of Montana, 1971

Presented in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

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Virgil's *Aeneid* has long exercised the critical acumen of scholars, and no portion of it has been more perplexing than its disconcerting conclusion--a conclusion which has even been described as unsatisfactory.[1] Aeneas slays the suppliant Turnus, whose soul flies, groaning and indignant, to the shades below (XII, 952): "vitaque cum gemitu fugit indignata sub umbras." Scholarship is generally agreed that the behavior of Aeneas is reproachable. Putnam has stated:

> It is Aeneas who loses at the end of Book XII, leaving Turnus victorious in his tragedy. Aeneas fails to incorporate the ideal standards, proper for achievement and maintenance of empire. . . . Aeneas fails, initially, because he kills the suppliant craving pardon at his feet. . .[2]

Anderson observes:

> Killing Turnus is a victory for the cause but not for Aeneas. In this final struggle. . .Aeneas can only be the loser.[3]

In Quinn's opinion:

> We must condemn the sudden rage that causes Aeneas to kill Turnus when he is on the point of sparing him--and when his death no longer makes sense, for Turnus has acknowledged defeat; the war is over and the peace terms agreed to. The killing of Turnus cannot be justified.[4]

These theories and many just as prominent treat the symptoms rather than the causes of Aeneas' enigmatic behavior. Fundamentally, the question remains: "Why, after such careful grooming and such painstaking education in *pietas*, after the inurement of self-denial, does Aeneas exhibit what appears to be a startling lack of *punctilio* in slaying the suppliant Turnus? It is my contention that Aeneas'

dispatch of Turnus is neither an aberration from proper behavior nor the re-emergence of the old Homeric ethos. The final act of Aeneas is the consummation of his newly formed character and is (pace Putnam and others) in keeping with the exigencies of creating and maintaining an empire. It is Turnus who holds the key to explaining the final behavior of Aeneas. He, like his Dardan antagonist, is a diachronic hero, a hero who looks both ways into time.

The diachrony generally ascribed to Aeneas, and that which I will presently reveal in Turnus, has seldom been imputed to Virgil. And yet the diachronic vision learned by Aeneas, the ability always to look both to antecedent causes and future implications, must also have been characteristic of the poet who gave the world this new type of historically conscious hero. Virgil, as well as Aeneas, was capable of diachronic vision.

The *Aeneid* belongs as much to the realm of history as it does to the realm of poetry. The reader is witness not only to a deftly reconstructed world of Homeric fable, but also to a world pervaded by historical associations that look to the past, present, and future. The Roman predilection for historical subject matter is inextricably bound up with the revivified belief in Rome's divinely mandated destiny (*imperium sine fine*), the revival of national sentiment and renewed pride of empire, generated by the accession of Augustus. As W. Y. Sellar points out:

> All that we know and can still see of Roman work suggests the thought of a people who had an instinctive consciousness of a long destiny; who built, acted and wrote with a view to distant future.[5]

My point is that Virgil, too, "wrote with a view to the distant future." Virgil knew, as did no other Roman epic poet, that although Rome's glorious destiny was assured, it would not be won without the greatest sacrifice. Thus his epic poem is the product of great literary talent coupled with perspicuous historical visions, lambent glimpses of intuitive prescience. And so historical vistas in the poem run not only from Aeneas to Augustus and back again, as has often been remarked, but also into the future. This has not often been noted by critics.

Aeneas as a diachronic hero looks both ways into time. He is representative of what is past and what is to come. In the Odyssean half of the poem he is constantly engaged in nostalgic reverie: as he beholds the *pictura inanis* of his kinsmen on the temple of Juno in book I, as he recounts with mingled relish and grief the charnel house of Troy's destruction in book II, and as he admires, in a moment of forgetfulness, the exquisitely fashioned reliefs at the portals of Acheron in book VI. For one who is fated to found the mightiest nation on the earth, such retrospection is witness to his incorrect thinking, and savants both human and divine therefore chide this man of memory. Specifically, Aeneas is being taught to exercise far-reaching foresight--an indispensible requisite of the new social ethos he is to assume. In order to act willingly on behalf of Rome's future he must abandon the nostalgic selfishness of the past, the self-regarding interests of the present and direct his vision forward to ineluctable destiny. To this end the future is revealed and reiterated piecemeal until book VI, when it is unveiled in its entirety by Anchises.

The development of Aeneas' foresight is the province of the first half of the poem. From the inception of his education Aeneas is taught to look forward. Thrice in book II he is scolded for his attempts to save a city that has been consigned to destruction. Hector, while admonishing Aeneas, gives a brief glimpse of the future to the unwitting hero (II, 293-295):

> sacra suosque tibi commendat Troia penatis:
> hos cape fatorum comites, his moenia quaere
> magna pererrato statues quae denique ponto.

After a reproval from the living Creusa, her wraith instructs him at the conclusion of book II (780-784):

> longa tibi exsilia et vastum maris aequor arandum,
> et terram Hesperiam vénies, ubi Lydius arva
> inter opima virum leni fluit agmine Thybris:
> illic res laetae regnumque et regia coniunx

Thus is Aeneas repeatedly brought from the self-regarding furor of the battlefield to the cognizance of present familial and future nationalistic duty. The sporadic flashes of future, still uncomprehended by Aeneas, are but the first seeds implanted in his mind.

Beleaguered, Aeneas begins his hither and thither journey, attempting to lay the foundations of the new city adumbrated by his spectral visitors. In Thrace, the shade of Polydorus moves Aeneas to seek the oracle of Apollo, whose voice, importuned, thus addresses the Trojans (III, 94-98):

> Dardanidae duri, quae vos a stirpe parentum
> prima tulit tellus, eadem vos ubere laeto
> accipiet reduces. antiquam exquirite matrem.
> his domus Aeneae cunctis dominabitur oris
> et nati natorum et qui nascentur ab illis.

Misinterpreting the oracle, Aeneas sails to Cnossus where plague besets him and his followers. The penates then appear to the slumbering Aeneas and assuage his fear by revealing that Hesperia is the land he seeks. It is at this point that Aeneas begins actively to seek a better destiny (III, 188):

> cedamus Phoebo et moniti meliora sequamur.

For the first time he enlists himself in a future foreshadowed and urged by divinity.

After Helenus, the spokesman of Apollo, reveals a more detailed vision of what the future holds, Aeneas displays a hitherto unexhibited foresight (III, 500-505):

> si quando Thybrim vicinaque Thybridis arva
> intraro gentique meae data moenia cernam
> cognatas urbes olim populosque propinquos,
> Epiro Hesperiam (quibus idem Dardanus auctor
> atque idem casus), unam faciemus utramque
> Troiam animis; maneat nostros ea cura nepotes.

The recognition of Italy as his future home and his admission that the future will not only be his care but that of his heirs gives evidence that his foresight is maturing, becoming more far-reaching.

That his *pietas* is not yet fully matured and firm, however, is evidenced by his dallying in Africa, contrary to the designs of fate. Within Dido's realm he has discovered the *modus viverdi* in which he can enjoy self-satisfaction, a place where he can salve the wounds inflicted by the loss of an heroic past. It is only when Aeneas has firmly entrenched himself in this sedentary existence and is enjoying the sympathy and love of Dido that Mercury, bearing the

mandate of Jupiter, rebukes him for his selfishness and again instructs him of his distant goal. That he has been allowed the lingering tastes of forbidden fruit and prolonged luxuriation in the past and present, and then is harshly brought back to necessities by divine admonishment, re-emphasizes by contrast that he can only be a man of destiny, a man of the future. The realization that he must conform to the designs of fate and abandon the present, as well as the past, instills a staunchness of purpose in Aeneas and starts him on his final voyage. He leaves knowing that the past and present are gone forever.

The remonstrance of the gods and the revelations of oracles and shades have had a two-fold purpose: 1) To physically remove Aeneas from the past, i.e., from Troy and all its reminders. 2) To effect a psychological conversion within Aeneas so that he will actively and willingly seek the Sibyl and his descent into the underworld, where Anchises may unfold for him the distant future. Thus Aeneas is on the verge of reaching a goal far removed in time and space from his ancient Troy.

In book VI the Sibyl reveals the *bella, horrida bella* that awaits Aeneas. Far from being startled, he stoically explains that he has foreseen this (103-105):

> incipit Aeneas heros: "non ulla laborum
> o virgo, nova mi facies inopinave surgit;
> omnia praecepi atque animo mecum ante peregi.

Aeneas' descent into the underworld marks his final abandonment of the past and displays the true direction and goal of his *pietas*.

Anchises, converted by Jupiter's omens into the prophet of Rome, concentrates now on the future. His duty is to enlist Aeneas into a new *pietas*--the foresight with which he himself has been invested.[6] Thus the entire tapestry of Rome's future is laid out before Aeneas, as Anchises in his review of Rome's future heroes, recites the rigorous schedule of destiny. The sum total of Aeneas' duty lies in Anchises' pronouncement of the *Romanae Artes* (852-853):

> pacique imponere morem,
> parcere subiectis et debellare superbos.

Aeneas is now prepared to implement the demands of the future.

The arrival of the shield, upon which are depicted the scenes of Rome's future, paves the way for a sinister revelation by Aeneas, an indication of the foresight he has now attained (VIII, 536-540):

> Heu quantae miseris caedes Laurentibus instant!
> quas poenas mihi, Turne, dabis! quam multa sub undas
> scuta virum galeasque et fortia corpora volves,
> Thybri pater! poscant acies et foedera rumpant!

Aeneas is prepared for war and speaks already as if treaties will avail nothing. He looks ahead to war and the exhibition of the greater part of *pietas--debellare superbos*. The forward-looking Aeneas is prepared for the final encounter with his diachronic antagonist.

Books VII-XII have been regarded as an Iliadic backdrop, against which the Homeric character of Turnus is played out to its necessary end. But alongside the patent Homeric allusions stand elements quite alien to them. Virgil's purpose here is first, to

depict the undercurrents of contemporary and future history, and second, to show that the Homeric hero-type, though archaic and long since dead in Aeneas, is still a prevalent force, temporarily diminished, but not extirpated by the legal and martial influence of Aeneas and the other Roman *pii*, up to and including Augustus.

These unhomeric elements reveal that Turnus is not simply a Homeric paladin, but a new and powerful enemy of Roman destiny. The contingent over which Turnus holds sway is armed with weapons more suggestive of Gallic campaigns than struggles on Scamander's plain. Curving battle-axes, willow shields, studded clubs, and *cateiae*, hurled *Teutonico ritu* (VII, 741) comprise the arsenal of Turnus' following. These weapons are not unlike those used by the Germanic hordes, and Turnus becomes as much a contemporary, or even future, enemy of Roman destiny as he is a representative of the old Homeric values. In addition, the very Achillean qualities possessed by Turnus also look forward to the future, for they are immortal qualities, evident even in later Teutonic war-chieftains. An examination of the *Germania* of Tacitus will reveal that the characteristics and mannerisms exhibited by Turnus are quite similar to those of the Germans (14.1):

> Cum ventum in aciem, turpe principi virtute vinci,
> turpe comitatui virtutem principis non adaequare.

In the *Aeneid*, Turnus evinces these same characteristics. He outstrips his column (IX, 45): "Turnus, ut ante volans tardum praecesserat agmen." Later, he scales the Trojan fortifications alone.

Spurred by his feats, Turnus' soldiers take up firebrands and join the fight. Like the Homeric hero, it is incumbent on Turnus ἀιεν ἀριστεύειν καὶ ὑπείροχον ἔμμεναι ἄλλων (*Iliad* VI, 208). But so also is it on the Germanic chieftain, for whom "it is shameful to be outdone in courage." Elsewhere in the *Germania*, Tacitus states (7.1):

> duces ex virtute summunt. . .et duces exemplo potius quam imperio, si prompti, si conspicui, si ante aciem agant admiratione praesunt.

This compares favorably with *Aeneid* VII, where Turnus exhorts his troops to arms (473-474):

> hunc decus egregium movet atque iuventae
> hunc atavi reges, hunc claris dextera factis.

The prelude to war in book IX provides another example of Turnus' diachrony. His actions are parallel to the boastful tactics of a sixth century Ostrogothic enemy of Rome, Totila, whom Procopius describes (B.G. VIII, xxxi 17-20):

> πρῶτα μὲν οὐκ ἀπηξίου τοῖς πολεμιοίς
> ἐνδείκνυσθαι ὅστις ποτε εἴη. . .καὶ
> ἱππευόμενος μεθίει ταῖς αὔραις τὴ δόρυ
> ἀπ' αὐτῶν τε κραδαινόμενον ἁρπασάμενος
> εἶτα ἑκάτερα καὶ μετὰ βιβάζων ἐμπείρως
> ἐφιλοτιμεῖτο τῇ ἐς τὰ τοιαῦτα μελέτῃ. . .
>
> First of all he was not at all reluctant to make an exhibition to the enemy of what sort of man he was. . . . And as he rode he hurled his javelin into the air and caught it again as it quivered above him, then passed it rapidly from hand to hand, shifting it with consummate skill, and he gloried in his practice of such matters.

These lines are comparable to Virgil's description of Turnus, XI, 51-52:

> en ait et iaculum attorquens emittit in auras
> principium pugnae, et campo sese arduus infert.

Both leaders resemble one another quite closely here, though removed a millennium and a half in time. More importantly, they are proud of their abilities: "Valor cognizant of its own worth"--*consciа virtus* (XII, 668). Hence Turnus is a man of the past, the present, and the future.

The behavior of Totila and that of Turnus is incompatible with Rome. But so is it inextinguishable. Totila is slain, but in his stead rises his subordinate, Teias (B.G. VIII, xxxv 20):

> Ἐνταῦθα μοι μάχη τε πολλοῦ λόγου ἀξία
> καὶ ἀνδρὸς ἀρετὴ οὐδὲ τῶν τινὸς λεγομένων
> ἡρώων, οἶμαι, καταδεεστέρα γεγράφεται
> ἣς δὴ ὁ Τεΐας δήλωσιν ἐν τῷ παρόντι
> πεποίηται.
>
> Here shall be described a battle of great note and the heroism of one man inferior, I think, to that of none of the heroes of legend, that namely which Teias displayed in the present battle.

Teias too stands among the foremost as the paragon of individual, self-regarding, Homeric courage and as an exemplar to his men. It is because this type of heroism is incompatible with the Roman social ethos and inextinguishable that Roman *pietas* must be predominantly martial.

These comparisons help to elucidate the pessimistic awareness of historical reality that flows through the poem. Certainly, Virgil was not gifted with mantic powers, but he did possess piercing insight into the historical actuality of Augustan Rome. The Roman world in which Virgil lived had been won and maintained by armed force and the Pax Romana of Augustus was being tried by repeated incursions of

Germanic peoples from the North. Moreover, the pessimism of the *Aeneid* has to do with the incompatability of two forces operative in the Roman mentality--the humanistic, moralistic, civilizing influence on the one hand, and obdurate patriotism on the other. Tacitus felt this as well. Though he admired the Germanic peoples and lauded their virtues he hoped that their discord would complement Roman arms, so that Rome's inexorable destiny might be fulfilled.[7]

Putnam observes: "Turnus. . .absorbs into himself for the final clash all the challenge of Mezentius. . .and. . .all the pastoral freedom of Camilla."[8] Putnam's observation about the character of Turnus in the final book conveys its comprehensive, synchronic nature, but falls short of recognizing its diachronic nature. Mezentius echoes his own sentiments and those of Turnus when he addresses his steed (X, 65):

> neque enim, fortissime, credo
> iussa aliena pati et dominos dignabere Teucros.

In lines 899 and following, Mezentius, as he awaits the death-stroke from Aeneas, reveals a bitter sentiment, a strong denial of surrender to the influence of Rome. He submits only to force:

> hostis amare, quid increpitans mortemque minaris?
> nullum in nefas, nec sic ad proelia veni
> nec tecum meus haec pepigit mihi foedera Lausus.

Camilla, the staunch ally of Turnus, is representative of the pastoral freedom so cherished by the Germanic tribes and for which Arminius destroyed countless Roman soldiers in the time of Augustus. Her death is described in identical terms with the death of Turnus.

When she is slain, her spirit descends to the shades, "resentful," as does the shade of Turnus. After Camilla's death (XI, 832-833),

> Tum vero immensus surgens ferit aurea clamor
> sidera: deiecta crudescit pugna Camilla;

In the context of Roman history, such words are a plausible postscript to the death of Turnus.

In the final book, Aeneas has discovered that intractible and primitive foes are unwilling to accept overtures of peace. Twice they have faithlessly broken treaties. Aeneas realizes that his duty of introducing the civilizing influence of law and peace must subordinate itself to the larger demand of *pietas--debellare superbos*. Turnus is a faithless suppliant in whom Aeneas sees the recrudescence of war. Turnus does not beg for his life but rather appeals both to Aeneas' *pietas* and to his humanity. But as Otis has stated: "In the Iliadic *Aeneid* his humanity is never exercised at the expense of his duty."[9] As he beholds Turnus at his feet, Aeneas' sense of foresight, developed to its fullest acuity, sees the present and future obstacles to Roman destiny. Turnus comes to represent every barbarian leader from Arminius to Gelimer, Totila to Caratacas. Aeneas has reached the fulfillment of his *pietas*, which is, in Virgil's symbolic structure, an abstract statement of the Roman impulse to conquer by force what cannot be tamed by pacts and laws. As he thrusts home his sword, Aeneas performs an act that is historically imperative. The archaism of Homeric individuality does not die with Turnus. The foaming lion, vestige of the Phrygian plain, will live on in other atavistic chieftains. At

the end of the poem we realize that the doors of Janus will again be open to new sanguinary vistas, and as Aeneas stands over the corpse of Turnus, he stands on the dire threshold of the future.

Notes

1. Robert B. Lloyd, "Superbus in the Aeneid," *The American Journal of Philology*, XCIII (1972), 125-132.

2. Michael C. J. Putnam, *The Poetry of the Aeneid* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 193.

3. William Anderson, *The Art of the Aeneid* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 100.

4. Kenneth Quinn, *Virgil's Aeneid: A Critical Description* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1968), p. 273.

5. W. Y. Sellar, *Virgil* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1908), p. 283.

6. Brooks Otis, *Virgil: A Study in Civilized Poetry* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1964), pp. 299-300.

7. Tacitus, *Germania* 33:

> nam ne spectaculo quidem proelii invidere; super sexaginta milia non armis telisque Romanis sed, quod magnificentius, oblectationi oculisque ceciderunt. maneat, quaeso, duretque gentibus, si non amor nostri, at certe odium sui, quando urgentibus imperii fatis nihil iam praestare fortuna maius potest quam hostium discordiam.

   E. A. Thompson takes especial note of the complacency and satisfaction with which Tacitus, a comparatively humane Roman, viewed the Roman slaughter and the internecine strife among the various Germanic tribes. *The Early Germans*, p. 91.

8. Putnam, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

9. Otis, *op. cit.*, p. 318.

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HISTORICAL APPROACHES TO THE "FALL" OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

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Rather than proceed with the tedious process of presenting a synoptic view of the historical works I have read I wish, instead, to evaluate the various hypotheses regarding the demise of the Roman Empire and weigh their relative merits. Since most historical facts concerning the later Roman Empire are well known I will employ them only insofar as they pertain to a given hypothesis.

* * * * * * * * * * * *

The end of the ancient world in the West is both a central and vexing problem of European History. It is central in that it announces the Christian-European civilization from which our own derives, and vexing, in that this period has been the subject of many and varied studies, whose conclusions are diametrically opposed to one another. It is a period fraught with such political, social, and religious moment that it has been repeatedly analyzed, revised, and reinterpreted. The decline of the ancient world confronts the historian with the spectacle of a leviathan collapsing under its own ponderousness. To some, it was a tragic spectacle, to others, merely the process of an ineluctable historical force. Yet it is for us to examine the whys and the wherefores of this curious phenomenon; to assess it and to discover what sort of phoenix rose from its ashes.

The Decline of the Ancient World, the *magnum opus* of A. H. M. Jones and an undertaking of encyclopedic proportions, may tend to discourage the less serious student because of its cumbersome narrative style and a lack of fluidity occasioned by its extensive factual data.

Yet it is a novel approach to the problem of a declining Rome in that it analyzes Rome's judicial, military, economic, and social institutions. It is, perhaps, the very expanse and complexity of Jones' work that makes us aware of the complex nature of Roman institutions, its multiplicity of functions, and its ultimate failure, due in part to its unwieldy framework. The importance of such an approach has been articulately pointed out by Speros Vryonis:

> It is often the administrative or governmental institutions of a state which hold the balance of a state's fate, for it is through these institutions that the energies and resources of the state are mobilized.[1]

The pervasive theme of Jones is that, despite the external pressure of the barbarian incursions and the internal cancers of peculation and malversation, the machinery continued to function, and that its ultimate demise was due to the barbarian invasions.[2] One must assume, then, that Jones believed the structure of government to be fundamentally sound for it continued to function under external duress for nearly four centuries.

The institutions of Rome have been condemned by historians as static, even retrograde forces in the later Roman empire and such inferences are not without merit. But it should be remembered that these institutions met the exigencies of an empire that had long since been static. When physical expansion of the empire reached its zenith under Hadrian, the governmental, social, and economic institutions were adequately adapted to the needs and designs of a predatory empire. Later, the momentous social, political, and military changes proved to be

crises for which the Romans were armed with an archaic and ossified tool. Despite their elasticity, the Roman institutions were not malleable enough to adapt to rapidly changing conditions.

With methodical precision, Jones explains the positions and functions within each of the major institutions, i.e., juridical, military, economic, social, and monarchical. His careful delineation not only reveals the intricate web and complex framework of social and governmental machinery, but also the opportunities such a complex scheme provided for every sort of abuse. Moreover, this complexity was in reality a mirror of the government's unwieldiness.

Historically, this general trend toward a more complicated governmental edifice was initiated by Diocletian upon his accession in 284. Although an emperor of unusual foresight and political acumen in comparison to his predecessors, his cure for poor government was more government. To ensure the safety of the empire's outer regions he increased the number of legions from 34 to 69 which increased the total, according to Jones, to 465,000 men.[3] In addition, he increased the number of governmental units (*provinciae*) within the empire by 50 which, perforce, brought its corresponding multifold increases in the number of *officia*. Diocletian's attempt to separate judicial and military functions in the provinces again increased the number of *officia*. This attempt at a system of "checks and balances" was doomed to failure. Granted, the government survived for several more centuries; but Diocletian had created an organism extremely susceptible to abuse and with such an unwieldy system, extending over most of the known world, abuse was to

become the rule rather than the exception. The increase in the size of government had been self-defeating. As Jones himself says:

> The ministers of the comitatus themselves, even if they were incorruptible--and they were, it would appear, often susceptible to influence and bribes--found it difficult to keep a check on the vast mass of business which passed through their hands. The emperor himself, snowed under with papers, could not examine every document submitted to him. He regularly threatened with penalties the clerks who prepared illegal rescripts. . . . But he openly admitted his impotence. . . .[4]

Economic institutions labored under the same burden. Although Diocletian deleted the *extraordinariae*, an irregular system for the exaction of taxes whether in money or kind, he maintained and even furthered what had always been a regressive tax system. As in the military and administrative institutions, he increased its size, the number of its functions, its number of civil servants and, correspondingly, the same opportunity for abuse. Since the rich and poor were taxed on the same basis, without regard for differences in economic condition, the poor found themselves dependent on, literally at the mercy of, the rich. Besides, it was much easier for a tax collector (*susceptor*) to extort from the poor farmer than from the rich landowner. Such abuses often went unchecked. It was necessary for the empire to extract every *solidus* it could from a docile peasantry and it is, perhaps, here that we can see the tragedy of the greatest exploitative empire of history feeding mindlessly on itself.

Studying the institutions of the monarchy, one can escape the generalizations about the impersonal forces of history. Nowhere in the

entire fabric of Roman decline is the individual character so much a prime-moving force as in the person of the emperor. A few examples should suffice to show how individual characters shaped Rome in her later years. Such a discussion should deal less with the question of good or evil emperors, for historians are generally less concerned with moral excellence than with the question of whether or not an emperor was politically astute or possessed a degree of foresight.

The absence of a dynastic tradition in the second century and part of the third had led to a quick succession of weak and indecisive emperors, intimidated by the army and given to granting lavish donatives and pay increases for the military. Such palliatives were a temporary anodyne for an ever capricious military force. The principal duty of the emperor in these turbulent times could be summarized in the words of Septimius Severus, "Make the soldiers rich and don't trouble about the rest."[5] Among this succession of lesser beasts rose Diocletian whose ability and personal presence allowed the empire respite, if only an ephemeral one, from its difficulties. Isolated instances of individual foresight did as much to preserve a languishing empire as did the institutions which were more directly connected with everyday domestic duties. It would also seem that the Teutonic virtue of a strong right arm was an often necessary, but wanting, virtue of the later Roman emperors.

Throughout Jones' study of the institutions are woven the insidious strands of peculation, greed, and delation. Such aberrations of

behavior appear not infrequently in later Rome although Jones seems to pay scant attention to them. Perhaps, the very size of the institutional structure made such abuse appear miniscule but he does admit to its ever increasing presence. Jones is reluctant to attribute this internal malady as a reason for the empire's demise. As I have said, Jones believed the system to be fundamentally sound and that the governmental structure did not truly lend itself to such widespread avarice. One theory maintains that the dilution of the upper classes by the curial and equestrian orders, those classes not ingrained with the long venerated ideal of Roman virtue,[6] caused the decline.[7]

Whether or not the system would have eventually collapsed from internal decay is now an academic question, a question which the Germanic incursions made moot. That the administrative and economic institutions survived for so many centuries while plagued with internal and external maladies is a mild tribute to Roman determination and pragmatism. Yet, I find it difficult to attribute the death of Roman institutions to the barbarian invasions, as does Jones. Although we can only speculate how many more centuries the machinery would have operated without the invasions, the trend indicated a slow, cancerous death. The barbarian invasions only served to exacerbate an already existing condition.

"The empire was destined to perish through its internal sores and through the dissolution of all its vital forces. . . ."[8] In this statement Ferdinand Lot presents his principal inference concerning the decline of Rome. His view regarding this decline in the spheres of

government, art, and literature is contained in an adjective which he employs frequently--retrograde. Evidently, Lot saw in the later Roman empire little that could be called commendable. In both domestic and foreign affairs, the empire was faced by crises that were in his view irremediable.

Beginning with the political crisis of the third century, Lot deftly traces the labyrinthine path the Roman empire unwittingly followed to the apocalypse. Diocletian reforms, which had a salutary effect on the Roman empire and gave it a temporary reversal of fortune, were actually ineffectual medicine aimed at erasing symptoms rather than effecting a cure for the disease. What is more, upon his voluntary abdication, Diocletian would take with him a necessary ingredient which might have insured the temporary success of his reforms--his personal ability as a leader and politician. Dynastic tradition was still absent and no plan had been formulated to insure inviolable succession.

Christianity, the new religion of an old order, deserves special attention. As a catalyst in the waning fortunes of the empire, it was not a decadent element. Christianity did not sweep through the empire subverting it by guile or sheer force of numbers. Nor did it enervate the Roman populace by stripping it of its martial values, although various Christian writings would have us believe this. As for the "sheer force of numbers" no better canvas is colored for us than that by Tertullian:

> For if we wished to play the part of open enemies and not merely hidden avengers, should we lack the power that numbers and batallions give? We are but of

> yesterday and we have filled everything you have--cities, islands, forts, towns, exchanges, yes, and camps, tribes, decuries, palace, senate, and forum. All we have left to you is the temples. We can count your troops; the Christians of one province will be more in number. . . .[9]

Such is the nature of many primary sources. They are prejudiced and at times exaggerated. Having spent a great deal of his life studying the census rolls, Lot claims that the Christian population in Rome did not exceed 30,000[10] and that there were only four locations in the Roman world that contained Christian populations of over fifty percent, namely, Edessa, Cyprus, Thrace, and Asia Minor.[11]

The paucity of Christians leads us to the problem of the conversion of Constantine--"the most important fact in the history of the Mediterranean between the establishment of Rome and the advent of Islam."[12] Christianity accomplished for Constantine what pantheism had accomplished for ancient Rome--victory in battle. To embrace Christianity as the state religion, as Lot says, was an act of sheer political folly.[13] Constantine as a visionary is difficult for me to accept, for the only evidence of this is a primary source that for all we know may be as distorted or exaggerated as the *Apologeticus*. Lot contends that Constantine embraced Christianity superstitiously, as one given to religious exaltation. Such a conversion is like that of the conversion of Clovis who, in 496, was given victory over his enemies by appealing to Jesus Christ.

As a state religion, Christianity ceased to be an external threat and became an internal one. In my opinion it embroiled the empire in

theological controversies and caused the expenditure of mental and physical energies which might have been more profitably diverted to the more pressing problems of an empire under seige. Moreover, Christianity alienated much of the nobility, most of whom were still predominantly pagan. It might appear that Christianity arrived almost providentially, as if to usher out the *senex mundi* and to bring in a new age.

No arguments dealing with the problem of Rome's collapse are more cogent than those which treat the economic conditions of the empire. Perhaps this cogency has to do with the importance historians have attached to economics in our own time. Economics is a tentacled creature whose intrusion affects every level and segment of society and the ebb and flow, success and failure, of civilization seems at least in our own time to be inextricably bound up with it. While there are too many facets of the problem to be discussed in detail, some of them included in economic retrogression are the debasement of coinage, the absence of capital and industry, an inequitable tax structure, and an unfavorable balance of trade, among others. A most patent fact in this decline is the slow transition from a monied economy to a more natural economy. *Specie*, both in quality and quantity, all but disappeared in the third century. A *solidus*, which at the time of Julius Caesar was struck at 40 to the pound, was, in the time of Septimius Severus, sixty percent base metal. Not only were the mines reaching the point of exhaustion, but much of the gold collected in taxes had been transformed into bullion or hoarded by wealthy individuals. Replacement of the tax with requisitions in kind (*annona*) was wasteful and detrimental to a

predominantly agricultural society. According to Lot, losses from theft, peculation, and spoilage amounted to two-thirds of all exactions. The backbone of Roman society, the farmer, was left with no alternative but to shirk the ever increasing burdens by literally selling himself and his children into slavery under a powerful landowner. In terms of the economy, Lot says the Middle Ages begin in the fourth century. With men increasingly bound to the soil, at the mercy of the *potentiores*, or driven to the likes of the Baugaudae, we see the disintegration of what had been Rome's most venerable and productive class, the farmer.

While Jones affords literature and art cursory mention, Lot grants them special attention. At one time, Roman classical literature was an expression of the aspirations and sentiments of a great empire. With the passing of Tacitus, we see the last of the great Silver Age classical authors, and the beginning of a sporadic succession of servile annalists and poor imitators. Lot speaks of the "blighting effects of the masterpieces"[14] which placed before men "the imitation of insurpassable models."[15] At its apogee, then, classical literature possessed that same rigidity, the same static conformity, that infected Rome's other vital forces. Yet, in the field of literature we are more likely to find the elements of decay or decline muted. What Lot describes as retrograde in the sphere of government and economics does not appear as an obvious feature in literature. Christian literature is the startling example. "Minucius Felix is every bit as good as Cicero."[16] In this assumption Lot appears correct. Close scrutiny of the *Octavius* reveals

a skillfully contrived and intricately woven patchwork of Roman antiquity's finest authors. Felix's claim to Lot's praise rests in his synthesis and adaption of classical writing to a new mode of thought. To be sure, classical writing dealt with commonplaces, but such commonplaces are universally intelligible to western man. Classical writings were not only a weapon with which the Christian apologist could successfully defend himself against the skeptic, but a mirror image of some of Christianity's most basic concepts. The same can be said in the realm of art, but Christian art nearly dismisses classical style for symbolic style which represents the separation of the ethereal from the corporeal, spirit from flesh, and the subordination of the human form to a higher being.[17] Its tenor is otherworldly.

In a final look at Ferdinand Lot, let us examine some of his conclusions. The Roman Empire was a unique phenomenon in the history of man. Not only was it the largest predatory empire that ever existed but it was also the seat of some of the most articulate and sensitive literary artists that the world has produced. In the same culture were spawned the vilest excesses and the most pristine virtue. Such uniqueness did not lend itself to ready adaption by the barbarians who found themselves heir to it. "Hence the entry of the barbarians into the Roman world under whatever form it took place, did not succeed in regenerating the ancient world or in replacing it by better political forms."[18]

Revisionism is as much a part of the historian's craft as are

the elements of research, objectivity, and writing. *The Transformation of the Roman World*, edited by Lynn White, Jr., is a reevaluation, two hundred years removed, of a prodigy in the field of historiography, Edward Gibbon.

Gibbon states four reasons for the fall of Rome: 1) an excess of wealth and luxury, 2) the barbarian invasions, 3) Christianity, and 4) immoderate greatness. The lattermost deserves immediate attention. It is not characteristic of modern historians to deal with nebulous causal factors, e.g., immoderate greatness, in explaining historical trends. As a staunch advocate of everything classical, Gibbon follows the approach developed by the ancient Greek historiographers. The Herodotean system, which he follows, can be outlined as follows: History is the recurrence of predictable patterns of behavior which begins with ὕβρις, too much striving, whether it be individual or collective, and resulting in subsequent loss of judgment. In the absence of sound judgment follows ἄτη, folly or madness in which those who have striven too far unwittingly indulge in outrageous behavior. Finally, divine retribution, or τίσις, stands as the result of folly.

Steeped in the classical tradition, Gibbon follows in the footsteps of Herodotus and his view of history is one of determinism. For this view, Gibbon is condemned by Lynn White, who believes that the individual is a prime and voluntary catalyst in the formation of history.

Although Gibbon writes with candor and self-assuredness, many of his ideas have long since been discounted. The cross section of articles

in White's anthology points not only to Gibbon's factual errors but to his prejudices as an historian, prejudices due in part to the influences of English society of the Enlightenment. Von Grunebaum observes that the historian is chained by his experience and the expectations of his public.[19]

Edward Gibbon's knowledge of certain subjects germinal to an understanding of the Roman fall were inadequate. Of these subjects, Christianity and the advent of Islam are two of the more important. Other aspects he chooses simply to ignore. He says, "I am ignorant, I am careless of the blind mythology of the barbarians."[20]

It is two hundred years that has given us deep insight into Gibbon and his history. These studies about him, and the criticisms of his errors and prejudices, criticisms which tend to make these errors all the more apparent with the passing of time, are less an indictment of him than a tribute to the great strides made in the science of history and the impartiality of current western thought.

Certainly Gibbon merits more attention than I have here afforded him. In a profound and articulate conclusion, Lynn White explains Gibbon in the light of two hundred years and the general trends of historiography. Gibbon labored under handicaps which do not face the present day historian. Much new evidence has appeared since 1764, new methods of research, and new archaeological findings. Yet what is most important in White's opinion is that new facts are less important than new ways in looking at them.[21] The absolutization of values is a pitfall

of the historian, one indeed that Gibbon failed to avoid. His entire approach to history has been refuted. History is not the movement of society's upper classes or subject to the structure of biological or historical determinism. Like Spengler and Toynbee, Gibbon has been relegated to that niche of historians who now appear as curiosities. Truly, "we are on our way to producing a history of the globe, and of all mankind."[22]

What and when is this period called "The Middle Ages"? Neither beginning nor end of this period lend themselves to clear demarcation, for such clear demarcation would tend to indicate a kind of absolutization or finality. The difficulty in ascribing a beginning to this age would indicate what Rostovtzeff calls a simplification, rather than a fall or an end.[23] As Lot suggests, dates are an arbitrary convention and as such are merely employed as references. Some historians have placed the beginning as early as 378 with the Battle of Adrionople. 476 appears frequently in texts because it heralds the year of the last Roman emperor. Pirenne, in his famous thesis, insists that the ancient world floundered circa 750 and that the Middle Ages commenced some two hundred and fifty years later. Such dating is per se unimportant, but it signifies the varied emphasis on certain causal factors and gives rise to the many postulates concerning the end of the Roman empire and the nature of the Middle Ages.

Perhaps the most controversial concept with respect to this phenomenon is that formulated by Henri Pirenne, which, simply stated, holds

that the Roman institutions remained intact and were assumed by the barbarians who used them as the Romans had. Rather, it was the Saracen invasion, not the Germanic, that caused the fall of the Roman empire. His theories have largely been refuted and nowhere more harshly than in an essay by William Bark.[24] Under the scrutinizing eye of Bark, the bulk of Pirenne's thesis appears as little more than an interesting bit of historiographical legerdemain. In fact, Pirenne may well be relegated to that select group of curiosities of which Gibbon is now a member. Bark's study contains interesting problems and it behooves us to examine them.

Pirenne claims that the Roman political system survived through the Merovingian dynasty, that these monarchs were absolute and wealthy, receiving most of their income from a tax on commerce, and that their ultimate bankruptcy was caused by the Saracen invasions. It would seem that Pirenne has given the barbarians political sophistication that historians, like Burns and Wallace-Hadrill, have been reluctant to grant. The complexity of the Roman institutions was, for the most part, beyond the grasp of the Teuton, whose simplicity was more suited to personal aggrandizement than to the difficult task of ruling an empire. Bark maintains that the Merovingian failure to retain the land tax was a fatal error. The tax, the cornerstone of an agrarian economy, yielded ninety five percent of the revenue for fourth century Rome, while all taxes on commerce yielded the remainder.[25] This tax on commerce, which Pirenne claims was the financial mainstay of the Merovingians, could not have yielded much. If we assume that the tax was enough to support them, then we could deduce that such exorbitance would have resulted in

a declining commerce, a decline Pirenne attributes to the piratical depradations of the Saracens. Moreover, evidence that the land tax was little used is provided by Jones who states that Clovis altogether abandoned it in Belgica Secunda in 486.

Lot claims that the only institutions developed by the Merovingians was that of the monarchy. It was a rigid absolutism that flouted the interests of the people. Their ineffectual rule was bound to destruction because, as Burns contends, their authority was won and maintained by force. The Merovingians, even while bearing the cross, failed to realize that a guiding force greater than physical coercion was necessary.

The succession of kings from the House of Meroveus did more to undermine their own authority than any usurpation of the Saracens. Endemic civil wars, chronic plagues, treachery, and external invasions from Avars and Saxons, and ineffectual and feeble government marked their demise.

Pirenne, in addition, places an inordinate amount of emphasis on the unity of the Mediterranean, a unity shattered by the advent of Islam. He pays scant attention to the role of fifth century Vandal piracy, which wrought havoc on maritime commerce. Gaiserich and Gelimer capriciously stopped the flow of corn and oil to Rome and her provinces. Moreover, when the Islamic fleet appeared on the Mediterranean they were not averse fo trading, especially with the shrewd Venetians.[27]

As in the case of Gibbon, I have not afforded Pirenne his due. He is deserving of considerably more analysis than can be given here.

His thesis, once held in esteem but now largely refuted, has done a great service to the study of Medieval History by regenerating an interest in its origins and problems.

Bark devotes a major portion of his study to an espousal of his own views on Medieval origins. His primary contention is that the fall of Rome, or rather its transformation, had a salutary effect and that the Middle Ages was a new experiment in humanity.[28] Man had changed his direction, his philosophy, and, as a fledgling of Christianity, was more optimistic. This period of history, in other words, had much to commend it. Society had been reduced to its most fundamental forms. Agrarianism dominated a decentralized and particularized way of life. While Christianity was establishing its suzerainty, the voices of classicism were retreating into an irretrievable past.

Bark's primary defence of his views rests on mechanical innovation. With man reduced to caring for the necessities of life, his attitude became more flexible and receptive to any simple amenity that might improve his lot. Using the theories of Lefebvre des Noettes, Bark catalogs the agricultural devices which changed the shape of western society. The advent of the horse collar increased the efficiency of the draft animal, as did the horseshoe and tandem harnessing. The wheeled plow, a German invention, and the three-field system decreased man hours. What all these inventions meant was a decline in the everyday drudgery of man. What is more, Lefebvre des Noettes maintained that these artifacts signalled the end of slavery by making it unnecessary and undesirable. So this, according to Bark, was the beginning of a

new era, one in which the dignity of man was paramount. Christianity, coupled with technological inventiveness, was instrumental in breaking down the superstitious animism of the barbarians.

Yet, this cloak of technology is a precarious defense. With all due respect to Bark and Lynn White, whose original ideas on this subject are compelling, there is another facet to this "Dark Age." Bark mentions in passing the barbarity of the age. The moral authority of the Church was only in its infancy and the celerity with which it disseminated its ideas during the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries gave rise to a considerable number of superficial converts. In fact Bark admits that the force of Christianity in the early Middle Ages was only a potential one.[29] Christianity had no little difficulty in converting the pagans, but did not succeed in eradicating the vestiges of a culture that reached far back into unrecorded time.

Bark envisions the period as having "fitful flashes of barbaric violence"[30] but in fact violence, delation, crudity, and vices of every sort were the rule rather than the exception. One need only peruse the pages of Bishop Gregory of Tours for evidence of this.[31] Graphic descriptions of death stain nearly every page of his history. The Germanic tribes, despite the belief of Richard Mansfield Haywood[32] and the grandiloquence of Tacitus, were first and foremost barbarians. As I have mentioned, they were given to every sort of excess and Gregory seizes many an opportunity to reprove them for their excesses.

We can discern from Bark's essay that the period of which he speaks is the early Middle Ages, specifically the fifth and sixth centuries.

Granted, technological innovations and adaptation was a plus factor in this age but it becomes suspect in the light of other primary evidence. How extensively these inventions were used or how widespread their distribution, Bark does not say. A detailed miniature from the psalter of Fouchard, ninth century, depicts an ox-drawn cart. The oxen are equipped with the conventional style collar. A later painting, which served as the cover for a poem by Prudentius, depicts a similar scene.[33] This particular bit of information creates a chink in Bark's defense, and although it is too insufficient to undermine his argument, nevertheless, it casts some doubt on how far advanced agricultural technology was.

The period following the deposition of Romulus Augustulus is referred to by Lot as an "accursed period of history."[34] The Merovingian age had little to recommend it and its rulers were lesser beasts compared to the likes of Marcus Aurelius or Diocletian. In Lot's opinion, what was good and noble in Roman life perished with the bad. The tragedy of this phenomenon manifested itself in the unwitting successors to the Roman world. They were unaware of what they had inherited. That the Merovingians were incapable of notions of government and unity is not surprising when we see their propensity for more mundane desires. A new question arises as to whether these institutions would have continued if the barbarians had been able to employ them. It is, it would appear, another academic question.

I have arrived at my own definition of this period, called both accursed and salutary. It was a period of decentralization and

particularism that presaged the modern nation states of Europe. Although this embryonic period resembled the future Europe in externals it did not have the spiritual and political merits which the later age possessed.

The waning of antiquity and the birth of the Middle Ages, as the central problem of European History will continue to arouse the curiosity of historians and to try their intellects because of its complexities and the vast possibilities it afforded for mankind. It is the complexity of this problem that has engendered many different theories. I have attempted to relate some of the most important, and if any generalizations can be made about them they are: 1) The historiographical ideal of objectivity is just that, an ideal. But history, as the totality of human experience, as viewed by still more human observers, finds itself the province of passion and prejudice. 2) The culture in which the historian lives and writes exerts a powerful influence upon his interpretation. His view may be modified by the pressure of his peers, or the historian may search for contemporary parallelism in the past. Or, he may view an earlier age as culturally inferior in comparison with his own culture.

Admittedly, I am a victim of prejudice. As a student of the classics, I regret that the Classical Literature reached its zenith so early. The literature that followed it was commendable for it was altered to meet the demands of new philosophies, a new spirit. It simply lacked the grandeur of language that so marked the Ancient classical authors. As for the Dark Ages, its violence and barbarity were endemic

despite the efforts of the Church. At what price was the new society of the later Middle Ages purchased? It is the only period of western history in which hundred of thousands of people were slaughtered in the name of an all merciful and just God. Such slaughter cannot but afflict twentieth century sensitivity.

If history has any universal lessons to teach, we would certainly find them in the fall of the Roman empire. There are parallels to be found between our own civilization and that of the ancient Romans. Perhaps civilizations differ only in their external appearances and contain the same germ of destruction planted within. It is fitting that this study end with an epigram of Livy, whose formulaic words might stand as an epitaph for many a fallen civilization: "We can neither endure our vices, nor face the remedies needed to cure them."[35]

Notes

1. Lynn White, ed., *The Transformation of the Roman World* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1966).

2. "It was the increasing pressure of the barbarians, concentrated on the weaker western half of the empire, that caused the collapse." A. H. M. Jones, *The Decline of the Ancient World* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966), p. 370.

3. Ferdinand Lot puts this figure at 550,000. Not only was an army of this magnitude a drain on the empire's financial resources, but Lot also claims that only a minute fraction of this number were actual fighting troops.

4. Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

5. Ferdinand Lot, *The End of the Ancient World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 10.

6. This is what Livy called "integra et immobilis virtus."

7. Such is the view maintained by Rostovtzeff. He believed that the higher classes were absorbed by the lower with an accompanying levelling, downward, of standards. This theory has little credence today. Actually, the pagan aristocracy of the time was not truly concerned with the problems that affected society as a whole and remained virtually aloof.

8. Lot, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

9. Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, Ch. 38 (London: The Loeb Classical Library, 1931), p. 169.

10. Lot, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 158.

17. Albert Hoxie's article "Mutations in Art" is most enlightening. He believes that the internal concepts of the Christian religion were not compatible with classical preferences in art. In other words, the old was incapable of explaining the new. Therefore, despite a decline in classical art, the general trend was toward a conscious abandonment of its principles.

18. Lot, *op. cit.*, p. 406.

19. White, ed., *op. cit.*, "Islam: A Changing Perspective," pp. 147-178.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 292.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 311.

23. Michael Rostovtzeff, "The Decay of the Ancient World and its Economic Explanations," *The Pirenne Thesis*, Alfred Havighurst, ed. (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1958), p. 10.

24. William Bark, *The Origins of the Medieval World* (Stanford: The Stanford University Press, 1958).

25. Jones, *op. cit.*; see Chapters XIII and XXII.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Bark, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 65, 69.

29. *Ibid.*; see the chapter "Medieval Metamorphosis."

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

31. Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, translated by Lewis Thorpe (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1974).

32. Richard Mansfield Haywood, *The Myth of Rome's Fall* (New York: Apollo Books, 1958), p. 16. As a classical scholar, Haywood's view may be colored by the descriptions of Germans offered by Tacitus. I am more inclined to disagree with him in the light of Gregory's descriptions.

33. Jacques Broussard, *The Civilization of Charlemagne* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), pp. 58-59.

34. Lot, *op. cit.*, p. 401.

35. Livy, *The Early History of Rome*, from the preface.

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THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE GALLO-ROMAN SENATORIAL NOBILITY

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A central fact of the Roman Republic was that it was elitist, a society and government of, by, and for the senatorial nobility. They were a class born and bred to assume the demanding duties of directing the welfare of Rome and overseeing her hegemony. Ascendance through the *cursus honorum* was the expectation of every senator for his male progeny. As the self-professed exemplars of all that was Roman, with genealogies that wound serpentine ways into a great mythological past, it was their task and theirs alone to conduct the Roman arts of which Virgil tells us: to impose custom, spare the subjected, and war down the haughty.[1] Yet, before all of this, it was incumbent upon them to safeguard the sanctity, exclusivity, social, and economic position of their class. These concerns were more fundamental, more urgent, than any consideration of duty toward the state. When all was said and done, civil discord, mutually destructive wars, anarchy, and general social and economic disintegration of the state were less important matters than those which touched self-preservation. Syme points out that for the senatorial aristocracy "poverty was the extremest of evils."[2]

With the end of the Republic and the accession of Augustus the nobility suffered political reversals and began their irretrievable decline. Their setback was no less marked by ignominy than their rise had been by greatness. In the reigns of Tiberius, Gaius, Claudius, and Nero the political power of the aristocracy, or what little of it remained, was as ineffectual as their wealth was stagnant. The class had become a useless limb, cosmetic, without real function. Tiberius

was revolted by their servility:

> memoriae proditur Tiberium, quoties curia egrederetur, Graecis verbis in hunc modum eloqui solitum "o homines ad servitutem paratos!" scilicet etiam illum qui libertatem publicam nollet tam proiectae serventium patientiae taedebat.[3]

In fact, Tiberius is more disposed to chasten the behavior of Rome's "best men" than he is to blame the excesses and foibles of individual emperors. He tidily summarizes the world the nobility had made:

> ceterum tempora illa adeo infecta et adulatione sordida fuere ut non modo primores civitates, quibus claritudo sua obsequiis protegenda erat, sed omnes consulares, magna pars eorum qui praetura functi multique etiam pedarii senatores certatim exsurgerent foedaque et nimia censerent.[4]

The enfeeblement of the senatorial nobility was further exacerbated by the systematic depletion of its ranks, brought about by proscriptions and trumped-up charges of treason. Emperors sought not only to remove them as political rivals but also to strip them of their enviable wealth. Men of foresight and principle perished along with the base and the indolent.

There is something peculiarly Roman about the dissolution. Once, they were a pragmatic, no-nonsense lot, paragons of the virtue necessary to maintain Roman society. But "ambition, display, and dissipation, or more simply an incapacity to adopt the meaner virtues and ignoble devices that brought success in a changed and completely plutocratic order of society, steadily reduced the fortunes of the nobles."[5] It was perhaps the sudden influx of wealth, immense fortunes gained with

little effort, whether licitly or otherwise, that perverted the cardinal virtues of this class. There was no corresponding ethic or morality to complement or temper the rapidly growing material gains. It would seem that the aristocracy, who prided themselves on learning the wisdom of the Greeks, merely caparisoned themselves with it rather than learned its deeper lessons. Moreover, the aristocracy proved the dictum of Aristotle that wealth is the source and stay of the aristocracy. The aristocracy was in the literal, classical sense, the rule κράτος of the best men ἄριστοι but best only in the material sense. Without moral foundation, without elasticity, its exclusive dominion was doomed to go the way of its Greek predecessor.

The disintegration of social and political life in Rome in the third and fourth centuries was occasioned by a landed senatorial class who, sequestered in their country estates, opposed every effort of the monarchy to restore unity to a fragmented empire. Even the sweeping reforms of Diocletian were undermined by the aristocracy. In an empire running short of manpower and money, the nobility could have exercised a remedial influence, however small. The *latafundi* of the senatorial nobility possessed nearly unlimited economic self-sufficiency and power. Larger estates became virtual microcosms of Rome by assuming many imperial functions. The master (*dominus*) of a large estate became, literally, the lord of people and territory beyond the confines of his domain. He maintained men-at-arms, kept private prisons, assumed judicial functions, and was the receptor of runaway slaves and harried

curials who sought respite from their onerous duties of collecting taxes. As the house economies of the larger estates became increasingly more independent and more powerful financially, their power to defraud the *fiscus* and bribe the few remaining tax collectors went unchecked. Manpower that was needed so desperately for the defense of the empire was commuted at the rate of thirty *solidi* per man, the income eventually purchasing the aid of unreliable mercenary barbarians.

Such was the reaction of a class that had suffered dishonor at the hands of the Severan emperors. In that tumultuous time emperors were made and unmade with frightening and unprecedented rapidity. The senatorial nobility found itself in more baleful straits than it had under the Julio-Claudians. Upon his succession Septimius Severus executed twenty-nine senators and paid the soldiers enormous donatives with the proceeds of confiscated senatorial property.[6] During the reign of Gallienus, senators were excluded from military command, a position that had traditionally accrued to their station.[7]

When Constantine acceded to power early in the fourth century he instituted several changes in the senate. First of all he expanded the senatorial order by enrolling equestrian magistrates and their sons. Positions that had once been the sole province of the senatorial nobility were awarded to senators and commoners alike. For example, the title of *comes primi ordinis* was extended to relatively low ranking persons. Moreover, admission to the senate proper need not entail ascendence through the *cursus honorum*, for a new member could be admitted

by imperial grant.[8]

There were those who still sought to hold the inveterate and prestigious position of consul because "the ordinary consulate, whose holders gave their name to the year, still retained its glamour."[9] But it seems that glamor was all it retained. Yet by preserving these titles the aristocracy claimed something other than wealth as its claim to preeminence. Titles are part of the intangible appanage of aristocracy through which it merited the respect traditionally due it. The consulate was even bestowed by barbarian leaders in the West.[10]

Through the welter of titles and inflated honors that one at this time might simultaneously claim one fact stands clear: There was, despite the contentions of J. B. Bury, no effective political power in the senate.[11] The spate of honorific titles was socially impressive, but failed to protect the nobility from the financial liabilities to which they became increasingly subject.[12] The diadem worn by the emperors was not merely a symbol of quasi-divinity but the reality of iron-clad sovereignty. Effectual power rested with the monarchy. Emperors of the later empire, in the manner of emperor Claudius,[13] surrounded themselves with and listened to the advice of the *cubicularii* (eunuchs of the sacred bed-chamber) and the *magister militum* (master of soldiers). These two groups accentuated the long standing enmity between monarchy and aristocracy.

By Constantine's time the senatorial order had become a mixed bag of geographical, racial, and social origins: barbarians, ex-soldiers, civil servants, palace eunuchs, Alans, Armenians, and Persians

all made their way into the senate, at least in the Eastern half of the empire. And, as the senatorial order expanded it became widely diffused in its domicile, in the West especially. In a word, the senatorial nobility, at once so imperial, was becoming more provincial.

Unlike the Eastern half of the empire, the West did not enjoy the relative immunity from barbarian incursions which Byzantine wealth could buy. Moreover, the later emperors were weak, indolent, and in the main, under the influence of barbarian generals. The western empire was being parcelled out to a number of barbarian tribes. North Africa had fallen to Gaeserich, Britain was lost beyond recall, the Franks had migrated from Toxandria and settled on the lower Rhein, while Savoy passed to the Burgundians. But for a small northwestern corner, all of Spain was under the suzerainty of the Goths. Territorial dissolution was complemented by the transferral of the imperial capitol from Rome to Ravenna in 402. Ravenna, surrounded by marshes and accessible only by sea, was far less vulnerable to barbarian ravagement than was Rome. From this time forward Rome ceased to be the cynosure of all eyes. The focus of history was receding from the brilliant city that had been the center of the world's greatest empire into an age and area of darkness. Though it would retain the name, the Roman Empire was neither completely Roman nor an empire. The old world was passing away and the infancy of another world was coming to be. A void had been created by the faineant emperors of the fifth century. Portions of the empire that looked to the emperor for spiritual and

military succor in a world that was collapsing around them could expect little consolation. The problems of imperial inactivity and impotency were counteracted by the Gallo-Roman nobility. This class became the repository for *Romanitas* and despite its many shortcomings became an illumination in what Lot called "an accursed period of history."[14]

Gallic nobility had maintained a spiritual, political, and intellectual affinity with Rome since Claudius first granted them admission to the senate.[15] He was impressed with their faithfulness and honesty. In the period under discussion "they never showed the slightest inclination to break away from the empire."[16] They truly felt themselves to be Romans, for they had been given a stake in empire. Still, historians, both ancient and modern, have attacked them for their idleness, their failure to take political initiative, their concern with pedantic erudition, and for putting their own interests ahead of the state. In addition they have been accused of hastening the fall of the empire in the west. To these criticisms I shall later return but let us first examine the social life of this class as revealed by one of its most eminent members, Sidonius Apollinaris. From an historiographical point of view the writings of Sidonius are of great value because most of the extant writings of this period come from the pens of ecclesiastical historians, hagiographers, and annalists whose works Hodgkin has impugned.[17] Sidonius has left us much of value about his class and his time.

Generally, one tends to think of fifth century Gaul as a hotbed

of tumultuous, bellicose activity, caused by precipitous attacks of wild barbarians. Mainly, the views of country life, as given to us by Sidonius, are quite to the contrary. In fact the most salient feature of country life in this time is its relative tranquility:

> How pleasant it is here to let the chirp of the cicadas beat upon one's ear at noon, the croak of the frogs in the twilight, the swans and geese calling upon their mates at night, the cocks crowing in the small hours of the morning. To this concern you may join the pastoral muse. . . . For often in their nightly rivalry of song the sleepless Tityri . . .make their notes heard in the meadows above the tinkling bells of their flocks.

Such is Sidonius' description of his beloved Aviticum.[18] As the Virgilian allusion suggests the country estate was a bucolic retreat, a landscape that was for the most part at peace. But the reference also suggests that like the young Virgil, Apollonius lived in an unreal world, one upon which he hoped the real world would not impinge.

Gallo-Roman literary awareness and perception of realism did not mature in the bucolic environment. They limited themselves to imitation rather than emulation of the great masters, whose autopsy of the less desirable aspects of existence made their exquisite phrases meaningful. In avoiding the cities and doting on the countryside, the aristocracy divested themselves of the urban environment that in Classical Greece as well as in Rome had been the essence of inspiration and social awareness. The inspiration and involvement afforded by the give and take of conversation in the urban setting was disdained by the nobility. The squalid dreariness of narrow streets was not fit subject

matter for the hexameter or elegiac couplet. In the time of Valentinian cities were clad in the stone panoplies which bespoke the realities of the age. Gallo-Roman sensitivity was pricked by cities whose walls were built with blocks quarried for theaters and basilicas. All was sacrificed for military strength. Sidonius and his fellow nobles shuddered both at the sight and thought of towns dressed as administrative or military complexes. The aristocracy at this time was guilty of shirking its responsibility.

Within the idyllic setting of the country estates the members of the Gallo-Roman nobility conducted the business that befitted their station. Like English country-gentlemen they whiled away their time hawking, hunting, playing tennis and innocuous games of chance, and in seeing to affairs tedious but necessary for the maintenance of their estates. These are the typical activities of the nobility, the features which distinguish them from the faceless rabble. Vectius, a friend of Sidonius, possesses the noble attributes which Sidonius so admires: his kindliness toward guests, a well set table, his ability to train dogs and manage falcons, his competence in rearing well-groomed servants.

This fastidious attention to menial detail, however gentlemanly, has led historians, both ancient and modern, to condemn the Gallo-Roman aristocracy. Failure to take an active part in the politics of an empire in which they apparently had a visible stake has been the chief recrimination in modern eyes. The aristocrat was no longer elevated

by public interests, his primary concern being the confines of his own estate and literary pursuits. Why the brunt of historical contumely falls specifically upon the Gallo-Romans is at times difficult to comprehend. Their abstention from an active political life was no recent development.[19] The historical philosophy of Sallust may provide both an explanation and a defense for the aristocracy's lack of public spirit in these times. According to Sallust, external threat is the force which brings to the fore the virtues upon which Rome was founded and sustained. The threat of an external enemy provides the social cohesion and marshals the physical, mental, and emotional fortitude necessary not only to repel invaders but also necessary for the function of society in the brief interim periods between conflict. We must now consider whether or not the "barbarian invasions" are aptly named. According to J. B. Bury and J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, the incursions of barbarian tribes amounted in the main to little more than "infiltration" or "peaceful penetration." The myriad tribes descended upon the empire seeking food and land rather than war. Many of them had been assimilated into the armies of the empire and tended the land as *laeti*. Moreover, according to Wallace-Hadrill, those barbarians who took or were given land were eager "to take account, so far as they could understand it, of the complexities of local tenurial practice. Even when they chose to live together in exclusive Germanic communities, they took notice of the ways of those they supplanted. One explanation of this may lie in the comparative smallness of their numbers."[20]

Thus perhaps the Gallo-Romans did not rush to the aid of a crumbling empire, either politically or militarily, because they felt that they were not being threatened. Sidonius' correspondence certainly indicates that the Gaul of his time was less a battleground than some historians would have us believe. What is striking about Gaul of Sidonius' time is the relative safety of travel throughout the countryside. Missing are the ambuscades, brigandage, and skirmishes of which the pages of Gregory of Tours are so replete.

E. Lucki, an economic historian, contends that the Gallo-Roman aristocracy was a force of moment in hastening the fall of the Roman empire and was instrumental in occasioning the loss of Roman Gaul. According to Lucki, the Gallo-Romans, despite their cultural and numerical superiority, passively suffered the Visigoths and other barbarian tribes to enter and settle Gaul. He assumes that the Gallo-Roman provincials "did not raise effective opposition to the invaders because they did not deem them truly dangerous to their interests."[21] His supportive arguments are based on a belief that the nobility in Gaul was postured against the monarchy and that the internal opposition of Gallo-Roman factions, each supporting a different claimant to the throne, made effective opposition impossible.

A most compelling argument appears to vindicate the Gallo-Romans from these charges and shows them as instruments of genuine Roman policy, rather than a passive group upon whom the barbarians forced themselves. The Visigoths, unlike many of the tribes that entered Gaul, were hostile to the Romans because of the excesses they had suffered

at the hands of Valens, and the addled son of Theodosius, Honorius.[22] When they moved into Gaul they were employed as federates against the Huns and in return for their allegiance they were given grants of land. Yet the Goths offended the Gallo-Roman sense of *Romanitas* as well as being adherents to the noxious faith of Arius. In reality, the Goths remained isolated in a world, a Roman world, indifferent to them. Wallace-Hadrill has said of the Visigothic advent into Gaul ". . .military occupation was one thing, and settlement another."[23] The Visigoths, not insensitive to the rebuff of their hosts, moved to Spain.

Nevertheless, in the eyes of Sidonius their Arian heresy was more venial than their vulgar mannerisms, their heathenism less fulsome than their un-aristocractic bearing:

> These are the men drunken with new wealth, who by the vulgar display of their possessions show how little they are accustomed to ownership, the men who go in full armor to a banquet, in white robes to a funeral, in hides to a church, in black to a wedding, in beaver skins to a litany. (v. 7)

Without force, it seems, the Gallo-Roman aristocracy had been able to rid itself of an unwanted, un-Roman neighbor and succeeded only in delaying the inevitable. Still other tribes, just as offensive to the Gallo-Roman sensibility, were settled on their native soil. This settlement too was the result of conscious Roman policy exercised by the most militarily eminent aristocrat of the age, Aetius the patrician, who was the effective master of Italy and Gaul. "He was a great landowner, a dynast with enemies at court, a man who could never afford to be disinterested, and hence public and private issues were deeply

entwined in every one of his decisions."[24]

It was at his behest that the Gallo-Roman nobility allowed the loss of two-thirds of their properties through *hospitalitas*[25] early in the fifth century. Aetius and the emperor Constantius, the then reigning emperor, settled the Burgundians in Savoy and the Visigoths near Armorica. The choice presented to the Gallo-Romans by Aetius was a simple one: The aristocracy could relinquish a large portion of their land to the barbarian newcomers or lose it all to the Bacaudae, robber-bands who roamed the countryside. Opting for the lesser of two evils, the aristocracy allowed the barbarians to settle. E. A. Thompson shows that there was no record whatever of serious tension between the tribes and their landlords at this time. The Visigoths too were given a stake in an empire they were expected to defend. Thus in a sense, the Gallo-Romans helped themselves and to some extent imperial policy for the compliance with imperial[26] request broke the alliance of Bacaudae and barbarian and set the interests of tribal nobility in conflict with the rank and file warrior.[27]

In the mid fourth century the Gallo-Roman aristocracy was at best a passive supporter of anything that remotely resembled imperial interest. Active leaders with the military acumen of an Aetius were lacking in this age and soon the dagger of Valentinian would put an end to a warrior who labored tirelessly in the interest of aristocracy and empire. The Gallo-Roman nobility continued to live as they had always lived, cloistered on their estates and in the thrall of an almost illusory, idyllic life. If their devotion to letters and literature and

the comfort of an otiose existence untrammeled by political and social complexities militated against their active participation in a world that was crumbling about them, then they were not deaf to the cries of the common people who so desperately needed their words of wisdom and spiritual solace. The Gallo-Roman aristocracy was destined to take its salutary position in society not just as a landed class but as a Christian, provincial nobility--as bishops. From the late fifth century the Gallo-Roman aristocracy would shoulder the responsibility of forming and protecting society.

The transformation from provincial to Christian aristocracy presents no clear-cut explanation. When Christianity became the official religion of the empire, the nobility accepted it, even if only nominally, to comply with imperial decree. Among the Gallo-Romans were numbered many psuedo-Christians including Ausonius who probably adopted Christianity as another in the long line of syncretic cults that had for centuries established themselves in the empire. By imperial command, Christianity had become an innocuous but necessary appendage of nobility.

There were those, however, who had caught the mysterious passion of Christianity and were moved by God's ambient but unseen powers. After all, what religion is without its true converts? Gallo-Roman nobles were not decadent Petronian voluptuaries and were for the most part free from the gross excesses of their Roman predecessors. In their correspondence we find sensitivity and compassion, though sometimes obfuscated by stilted and vapid prose. Ruralism itself brought them

closer to God whose will was manifested through the miracles of local saints and holymen, even by men of noble Gallo-Roman birth. Country life was not idle nor filled with ennui because the same distraction from reality it had spawned created the religious contemplation that would eventually impose itself upon and shape society. The culmination of this new spirit would find itself in the office of the bishop.

The nobility was certainly aware of the religious ferment bubbling in the very marrow of their districts. It would be a mistake to attribute the Gallo-Roman return to the responsibilities of society as the result of mystical whosesale conversion. Their re-emergence into the political limelight smacks of calculation and political self-interest. Even so, the Gallo-Roman asserted himself with proper conduct for the most part and seldom used his rediscovered influence in his capacity as bishop for personal aggrandizement.

Sidonius numbered the tenure of high public office among the duties of the noble. Such office-holding was less a responsibility than it was one of the many superficial trappings that distinguished the noble and set him apart from those around him. But the lure of high public office was to prove itself a nauplian beacon. It was during his tenure as prefect of Rome that Sidonius met with disillusion. From the magical distance of his native Gaul and from the exquisite descriptions of classical literature, Rome was bedizened with a tinsel and glitter it did not possess. The disparity between poetic description and political reality was disheartening. Sidonius, as prefect,

realized that the post of *praefectus urbi* was a position fraught with danger and uncertainty, an onerous burden whose demands could scarcely be met, if at all, in these times.

Utter disappointment at this turn of events directed the attention of the Gallo-Romans back to their native land and to the bishopric. Despondent over the thought of being considered *zweitrangig* (second class, "bumpkinish"), the nobility accepted the bishopric as the new consulate in the *cursus honorum*.[28] What affinity the Gallo-Romans had with an empire that had turned its back on them was now expressed through this office. Christianity, an inextricable part of *Romanitas* since the early fourth century, would survive, flourish, and create a new society under Gallo-Roman guidance. In the bishopric ecclesiastical and temporal functions were united and to fill this office the people sought men not only of noble family but men with civil and administrative experience. It was the bishop's duty to adjudicate in the courts, mediate between barbarian and emperor, and to protect his congregation as *defensor civitatis*.

It was shortly after his resignation that Sidonius assumed the bishopric of Clermont. Owing to the political expediency of the monarchy, Gaul was sacrificed to Euric and the Gallo-Roman aristocracy consigned administratively to the barbarian's whim.

The attraction of the bishopric does not seem particularly enigmatic. "Ecclesiastical demarcations followed, for the most part, the lines of old Roman administration."[29] Alaric's sack of Rome in

410 left the city devoid of civil government and in a state of confusion. Hereafter, the civil and administrative duties fell to the bishop. He became in effect the continuator of Roman law and order and the shepherd of Rome's temporal as well as spiritual interests. Furthermore, the heroism of Leo in averting the onslaught of Attila cast him as the savior of Rome. The bishop had not only become the *defensor civitatis* but also the *defensor imperii*, for Rome, if nothing else, was still symbolic of a great empire. Seen in this light, the assumption of the bishopric was not a lateral but upward move for the Gallo-Roman aristocrat, whose provincial towns suffered the dearth of imperial officials. The bishopric was not just a surrogate for the consulship but an office superior to it and provided the nobility the means to political re-instatement.

With the exception of Aetius, the Gallo-Roman aristocracy had for the past two centuries been militarily ineffectual. Early in the fourth century all of the frontier armies had been withdrawn from Gaul by Stilicho, Master of Soldiers to Honorius.[30] Moreover, the noble class had not been inclined to pick up arms to correct the wrongs and stay the excesses of rapacious governors. In assuming the responsibilities of the bishopric the Christian aristocrat availed himself of the only weapons at his disposal--his faith and his rhetoric. Rhetoric --form without substance, a mark of decadence for which historians malign the aristocracy, became a tool, albeit not always successful, in mitigating the spiritual and physical depradations wrought by the

barbarians against Gallic society. During Euric's seige of Clermont, Sidonius bolstered the courage of his flock with his spiritual exhortations and strengthened their resolve to resist with eloquent allusions to Rome's past and their duty as Romans. Reliance on the art of language was urged by Sidonius in gaining just ends. Concerning the case of a free woman wrongfully enslaved he wrote to Pope Lupus:

> By some wise and well considered sentence you may make the former [the woman] less distressed, and the latter less guilty and both more secure, lest otherwise, such is the disturbed state of the times and the district, the affair go on as fatal as its beginning. (vi. 4)

Sidonius also took especial pleasure in his ability to beguile the barbarian leaders at the gaming tables. He loses at backgammon to Theodoric with the hope of gaining some boon. During Euric's occupation of the area surrounding Clermont, the estate of Sidonius was confiscated and the pen of Sidonius, as it had so many times before, produced another exquisite panegyric with a view to regaining his lost property. If we consider this act to be self-seeking we must remember that the foremost concern of aristocracy was for itself. Yet without their wealth the nobility could not alleviate the physical distress of the poor. Thomas Hodgkin has said of Sidonius Apollinaris, "He was essentially an author and a courtier and only accidentally divine."[31] The parting plaints of his congregation are far more felicitous and revealing of his character than the criticism of historians:

> Good shepherd, why are you deserting us? To whom will you abandon us, your orphan children?

> If you die, what sort of life can we expect?
> Will there by anyone left to season our lives
> with the salt of wisdom and to inspire in us
> the fear of the Lord's name with the same in-
> sight that you have shown?[32]

The Gallo-Roman aristocracy of Sidonius' time was neither as diffident nor as mired in a bog of literary and social stagnation as it appeared. Sidonius realized that his wealth of classical knowledge and his persuasive rhetoric were the tools of aristocratic administration. With these weapons at his disposal, he and subsequent Gallo-Roman bishops would not be cowed by the likes of the Merovingians. The new administration was one of *Romanitas*, as it had been long ago, joined with the new religion. I will not concur with Samuel Dill when he says "Faith in Rome had killed all faith in a wider future for humanity."[33] Granted, the sentiments expressed in Virgil and Sallust to which they so desperately clung were but echoes from the past but the pending turbulence would rekindle in the Gallo-Romans the old Roman *virtus*, and they would shoulder the hard yoke of necessity as had their forerunners. And so it came to be in the time of Gregory, Bishop of Tours.

The strong localism of the aristocracy "insured that the influence of the governing classes reached down to the very bottom of provincial society."[34] This fact insured the aristocracy's very continuation for it was to this class that the beleaguered peasantry turned, not to a far distant Rome. What is more, this strengthened position in society guaranteed the nobility a place in the courts of

the Merovingian kings to whom the future of Gaul was entrusted. Although Gallo-Romans became as comfortable in the courts of the Merovingians as they had once been in those of the Roman emperor, they were no mere accoutrement but a force with which the new leaders would have to reckon.

Clovis, *magnus et pugnator egregius* as Gregory proudly called him, marked the transition from emperor to Christian king. The Salian Franks, filtering down from the marshes of Toxandria, "had neither the desire nor the means to resist the process of Romanization."[35] Though fierce and warlike possessed patent military superiority, it was unequivocally made known to them that Roman law, population, and the strength of almighty God lay with their hosts. Bishop Remigius of Rhiems, sprung from a noble family of account in Laon, brought Clovis under the sway of Roman Christianity. In the conversion of Clovis we see one of the great victories of the Gallo-Roman nobility, "we hear of the victory of spiritual power over wild, untamed character. We see a Catholic bishop, with no material force at his command, by strength of will and sense of lofty mission, mastering the young impetuous chief of the pagan Franks, and. . .winning him from paganism to be the champion of the Church."[36] Remigius takes it upon himself to employ his learning, his religious fervor, and his family wealth to improve the lot of mankind. With S. Remi, the Gallo-Roman nobility finds its other true mission and a stature of paramount importance in early Europe.

In his preface to the *Historia Francorum* Gregory of Tours asserts both his nobility and his Catholic faith. The epoch about which he writes is stained with the carnage of the maleficient sons of Lothar. Seldom do we turn a page that does not describe in graphic detail the outrages, blasphemies, and depradations of the Merovingians. Despite the efforts of Gregory and his fellow Gallo-Roman bishops many excesses went unchecked but he is unflagging in his Christian duty as a Gallo-Roman noble. In Gregory's time the disorder of society was such that as a compassionate Christian and noble he could not remain aloof. Not with the sword, but with his faith and words does he scold the wayward Chilperic and constrain him to do his duty as a Christian king:

> My Lord king, if any one of our number has attempted to overstep the path of justice, it is for you to correct him. If on the other hand, it is you who act unjustly, who can correct you? We can say what we think of you. If you wish to do so you listen to us. If you refuse to listen, who can condemn you for it, except him who has promised eternal justice?. . . You have the law and the canons. You must study them diligently. If you do not carry out what they say, you will soon come to realize that the judgment of God hangs over your head.[37]

Christianity, as espoused by the nobility, is the only rein on the caprices of the Merovingians. The Christian aristocracy is in its nonage, as is the world it is attempting to salvage, but Gregory is in the process of inculcating the religion that will be the foundation of society millennia hence. The tone of Gregory's history is both didactic and

admonitory. If havoc is wrought on the innocent, so will it be on the malefactors. Goodness and moral steadfastness will guarantee one, regardless of station, a place in heaven. It is from the Gallo-Roman aristocracy that religious prescriptions emanate, descending to the peasantry and rising to the monarchy. This class is the source of inspiration, protection, and consolation. Like the stylite and the anchorite, they have achieved a semi-divine status, by offering spiritual certitude in a lawless world.

In this time Christianity was penetrating to the very roots of existence and we are witness to the spectacle of the most intense religious ardency mingled with the grossest superstition. Rome, the *senex mundi*, had passed away as a political reality. The spirit that had created and maintained it no longer moved men's souls. In a world whose foundations had crumbled and whose sense of law and order was moribund, the only succor was to be found in the world beyond. Yet much of what was commendable in the Roman world had not perished but remained alive in the Gallo-Roman nobility. Their devotion to life and letters, be it Virgil or the Bible, coupled with the proud traditions of Roman family life, was linked to and inspired by Christian faith. In a world that had undergone profound change the Gallo-Roman aristocracy forged and hammered a new aegis under which society would struggle but proudly survive. I will concur with Samuel Dill when he says that the Gallo-Roman aristocracy was "the salt of Gallo-Roman society and saved it from ruin."[38]

Notes

1. Virgil, *Aeneid* VI.852-853.

2. Sir Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1939), p. 501.

3. Tacitus, *Annales* III.65.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Syme, *op. cit.*, p. 502.

6. A. H. M. Jones, *The Decline of the Ancient World* (London: Longmans, 1966), pp. 15-16.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

8. The *adlectio* was an imperial decree which granted the right of senatorship without requiring the previous tenure of republican magistracies.

9. Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

10. Theodoric, Amalasuntha, and Odoacer still continued to appoint consuls. The last Western consul was Paulinus, appointed in 534. Clovis was a barbarian recipient of the title.

11. J. B. Bury, *The Later Roman Empire*, 2 vols. (Dover Books, 1889): "The senate remained an important institutional body, with rights and duties. . . ." (Vol. I, p. 18).

12. Follis, *oblaticum aurum.*

13. Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars*, Book 5: *The Deified Claudius*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), XXVIII.

14. Ferdinand Lot, *The End of the Ancient World and the Beginning of the Middle Ages* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961).

15. Tacitus, *op. cit.*, A XI.25: "Orationem principis secuto patrum. . . ."

16. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, Vol. II (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), p. 1022.

17. "And what tons of worthless material the ecclesiastical historians and controversialists of the time have left us." Thomas Hodgkin, *Italy and Her Invaders*, Vol. II (Oxford: At the University Press, 1892).

18. In the province of Auvergne, southcentral France.

19. Syme, *op. cit.*, p. 23:

> L. Licinius Lucullus, thwarted of his triumph for years by the machinations of his enemies, turned for consolation to the arts and graces of private leisure: he transmitted to posterity not the memory of talent and integrity, but the eternal exemplar of luxury. Secluded like indolent monsters in their parks and villas, the great piscinarii, Hortensius and the two Luculli, pondered upon the quiet doctrines of Epicurus and confirmed from their own careers the folly of ambition, the vanity of virtue.

20. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Barbarian West, 400-100* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 24.

21. E. Lucki, "The Role of the Large Landholders in the Loss of Roman Gaul: A Case Study in the Decline of the Roman Empire in the West," *American Journal of Economics* 20 (1960), p. 90.

22. See Ch. IV, E. A. Thompson, *The Early Germans* (Oxford: At the University Press, 1965), *passim*.

23. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, "Gothia and Romania," *The Long-Haired Kings* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1962), p. 32.

24. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Barbarian West*, p. 24.

25. Under this system, dating from Republican Rome, the owner was bound to give 1/3 of his produce to guests whom he reluctantly harbored. Later the principle was applied to the land and increased to two-thirds.

26. A contradiction may appear in that the Gallo-Roman aristocracy crossed imperial interest by first admitting the Visigoths and then "browbeating" them into their southward migrations. This latter action, too, anticipated Aetius, who had he not died, would have driven the Visigoths out of Gaul after they put the Bacaudae threat to rest. See Wallace-Hadrill, *ibid.*, Chapter II.

27. E. A. Thompson, "The Settlement of the Barbarians in Southern Gaul," *Journal of Roman Studies* 46 (1956), pp. 65-75.

28. Karl Friedrich Strohecker, *Der Senatorische Adel Im Spatantiken Gallien* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1948), p. 43.

29. Samuel Dill, *Roman Society in Gaul in the Merovingian Age* (New York: Barnes and Noble, reprint from 1926 edition), p. 476.

30. Strohecker, *ibid.*, p. 44:

> Der Heermeister Stilicho, der nach dem Tode des Theodosius als Vormund des jungen Kaisers Honorius die Geschicke des Westens bestimmte, scheint gleich zu Anfang gallische Truppen vom Rhein nach Halien abgezogen zu haben. Weitere starke Kontingente aus dem Westen folgten, als zu Beginn des funften Jahrhunderts die Goten unter Alarich von den Donaulandern her in Oberitalien eingebrochen waren.

31. Hodgkin, *op. cit.*, p. 318.

32. Gregory of Tours, *A History of the Franks* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1973), pp. 135-136.

33. Samuel Dill, *Roman Society in the Last Century of the Western Empire* (London: MacMillan and Company, 1906), p. 211.

34. Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1971).

35. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, "Frankish Gaul," *The Long-Haired Kings*, p. 1.

36. Dill, *Roman Society in Gaul in the Merovingian Age*, p. 32.

37. Gregory of Tours, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

38. Dill, *Roman Society in the Last Century of the Western Empire*, p. 273.

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