

## X

## THE FLAVIANS

(69-96)

**Galba, Otho and Vitellius (68-69).**—The prætorians demanded the rich donative which had been promised them in the name of Galba. "I choose my soldiers," he replied, "but I do not buy them." This haughty speech was not borne out by vigorous acts. Otho, a former friend of Nero, an ambitious man overwhelmed with debts, had no difficulty in stirring up the prætorians to massacre Galba.

But already the legions of the Rhine had at Cologne proclaimed their commander, Vitellius, emperor. They marched upon Italy, and near Cremona won a great battle in consequence of which Otho killed himself.

Vitellius was famous above all for his voracity. He permitted the soldiers to do everything and troubled himself about nothing except his pleasures, never dreaming that the Eastern legions might feel tempted to imitate what the Gallie legions had done for Galba, the prætorians for Otho, and the legions of the Rhine for himself. The profits of a revolution were now so certain that each army desired to secure them. Vespasian was then at the head of powerful forces, charged with subduing the rebellious Jews. His troops proclaimed him emperor. Leaving to his son Titus the task of besieging Jerusalem, he marched to take possession of Egypt and despatched Mucianus to Italy. The latter was forestalled by Antonius Primus, who defeated the troops of Vitellius near Cremona and a few days later captured Rome. Vitellius, after suffering many outrages, was put to death.

**Vespasian (69-79).**—Flavius Vespasianus, the son of a tax collector, was of plain manners and had made his way by merit. He learned in Egypt of the successes of his generals and the death of his rival. But two wars were still going on. Titus conducted that against the Jews which though fierce was not dangerous to the empire. The other, of far more serious nature, sprang from the rebellion of the

Batavian Civilis. This man, a member of the Batavian royal family, had resolved to free his nation. He summoned the Gauls to independence and the Germans to the pillage of the provinces. The Gauls could not agree among themselves. Cerealis, one of Vespasian's generals, vanquished Civilis, who retired to his island, organized there a vigorous resistance and finally obtained an honorable peace for the Batavi. They remained, not the tributaries but the allies of Rome, on condition of furnishing soldiers. While these events were taking place, Titus was repressing the revolt of the Jews. Roused to sedition by the extortions of their last governors, they had heroically recommenced the struggle of the Maccabees against foreign domination. They believed that the time was come for that Messiah whom their sacred books foretold. Refusing to recognize him in the holy victim of Golgotha, they thought that he was about to manifest himself, glorious and mighty, amid the crash of arms. The insurrection had invaded Galilee, where the historian Josephus organized the rebellion. Vespasian and Titus confined it in the capital of Judæa. After a memorable siege Jerusalem fell. The Temple was burned, the ploughshare passed over its ruins and the dispersion of the Hebrew people began (70). Eleven hundred thousand Jews fell in this war.

While Vespasian's generals were rendering his arms triumphant, he himself at Rome was degrading unworthy senators and knights, improving the finances that Nero had left in a wretched state, restoring the Capitol which had been destroyed in a conflagration, constructing the immense Coliseum and the temple of peace, founding a library, and appointing teachers of rhetoric whom the state paid. Nevertheless Vespasian felt obliged to expel from Rome the Stoics, who ostentatiously displayed republican sentiments. Because of his too great freedom of speech the most respected of the senators, Helvidius Priscus, was exiled and afterward put to death, though contrary to the intention of Vespasian. Of serious mind, a man of business and method, Vespasian laughed at flatteries as at apotheosis. "I feel myself becoming a god," he said when he beheld his last hour approaching. But he tried to rise, saying, "An emperor should die on his feet."

**Titus (79-81).**—He was succeeded by Titus, who had distinguished himself in the German and British wars and



especially in Judæa. Though his dissoluteness and violence had been feared, he surprised all by his self-control, and his gentle and affable manners won for him the surname of "Delight of the human race." He considered a day lost in which he had done no good action.

Frightful calamities attended his brief reign. A conflagration lasting three days devastated a part of Rome. Pestilence ravaged Italy. On November 1, 79, Vesuvius suddenly vomited forth masses of ashes and lava which buried Herculaneum, Pompeii and Stabiae. Pliny the naturalist, then commanding the fleet of Misenum, wished to behold this terrible phenomenon close by, and was either stifled by the ashes or crushed by the stones shot forth from the volcano. Titus reigned only seventeen months.

**Domitian** (81-96). — Domitian, his brother, was immediately proclaimed. In his first acts he showed firmness and justice, repressed all the abuses of which he could obtain information, and by his active watchfulness assured to the provinces an almost paternal government. The frontiers were well guarded and the barbarians held in check, including the Dacians who were becoming formidable. But as his thirst for money grew with his fears, he soon became grasping and cruel. Informers multiplied and were followed by executions. His cousin Sabinus was put to death, because the crier who was to name him consul by mistake had called him emperor. Many rich persons on account of their wealth were accused of high treason.

A revolt of the governor of upper Germany increased his tyranny, because Domitian believed himself to be surrounded even in Rome by the accomplices of the rebel. Many senators perished. Some were accused of the new crime of judaizing. Under this pretext his cousin Flavius Clemens and his own niece Domitilla were condemned. At last a plot was formed among the people of the palace, by whom he was murdered.

It was Domitian however who completed the conquest of the greater part of Britain. Vespasian had sent thither Agricola, the father-in-law of Tacitus, who pacified the island without however subduing the mountaineers of Caledonia. Only the south of Scotland was united to the province. To protect it against incursions from the north, Agricola raised a line of fortified posts between the firths of the Clyde and the Forth, and Roman civilization aided by numerous colonists speedily took possession of Britain.







## XI

## THE ANTONINES

(96-192)

**Nerva** (96-98).—The Flavian family was extinct. The senate made haste to proclaim Nerva, a former consul. With this prince began a period of eighty years which has been called the golden age of humanity. It is the epoch of the Antonines. Though Nerva displayed good intentions, he had neither the strength nor the time to realize them. He adopted the Spanish Trajan, the best general of the empire.

**Trajan** (98-117).—When Nerva died, Trajan was at Cologne. Recognized as emperor by the senate, the people and the armies, he remained one year more on the banks of the Rhine to pacify the frontiers and restore discipline. He wished to enter Rome on foot. The Empress Plotina followed his example. As she ascended the palace steps, she turned toward the crowd to say, "What I am on entering, I wish to be on departing." Trajan banished informers, diminished the taxes and sold the numerous palaces which his predecessors had acquired by confiscations. In order to encourage the free population, he distributed among the cities of Italy revenues intended for the support of poor children. The senate could almost believe itself transported to the days of its ancient power, for it deliberated on serious affairs and really assigned the offices. Trajan even restored the elections to the comitia. At least the candidates presented themselves to solicit as in former days the votes of the people. He himself in Campus Martius canvassed in the midst of the crowd. The monuments which he raised had as their object public utility or the adornment of Rome, like the Trajan column which still recounts his exploits. Among his works the most important were the completion of a highway which traversed the whole Roman empire from the Pontus Euxinus to Gaul, and the restora-



tion of the road thrown across the Pontine marshes. He caused the seaports of Ancona and Civita-Vecchia to be excavated at his expense, established colonies in different places, either as military or commercial stations, and founded the Ulpian library, which became the richest in Rome. Only two reproaches can be brought against him; he had not the sobriety of Cato and he persecuted the Christians. He forbade their being hunted, but ordered that such as made themselves prominent should be beaten. He himself condemned Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, to be cast to the lions.

His reign was the most warlike which the empire had beheld. He directed in person an expedition against the Dacians (101), crossed the Danube at the head of 60,000 men, vanquished the barbarians in three battles, captured their capital, Sarmizegethusa, and forced them to sue for peace (103). The following year they rebelled again. Trajan threw over the river a stone bridge, the remains of which are still to be seen, several times entered Dacia, vanquished Decebalus, who killed himself, and reduced the country to a province. Numerous colonists were sent thither and flourishing cities rose. In consequence the Roumanian nation still speaks on the banks of the Danube a dialect which is almost the language of the contemporaries of Trajan.

In the East he reduced Armenia to a province. The kings of Colchis and Iberia promised entire obedience, and the Albanians of the Caspian accepted the ruler whom he gave them. One of his lieutenants, Cornelius Palma, had already subjugated some of the Arabs. Trajan penetrated into Mesopotamia, captured Ctesiphon, Seleucia and Susa, and descended as far as the Persian Gulf. "If I were younger," said he, "I would go and subdue the Indies." Such rapid conquests could not be durable. The vanquished rose as soon as the emperor departed and the Jews again revolted everywhere. Blood flowed in streams. Trajan had not even the consolation of seeing the end of this formidable insurrection. He died at Selinus in Cilicia.

**Hadrian** (117-138). — Hadrian abandoned the useless conquests of his predecessors in the East. To prevent the inroads of the Caledonian mountaineers into Britain, he constructed from the mouth of the Tyne to the Solway Firth the wall of the Picts, numerous remains of which

are still to be seen. His only war was a fierce one against the Jews. He changed the name of the city of David to *Ælia Capitolina*, erected there altars to all the gods and forbade the Jews to observe the bloody rite of circumcision. Thus they were now threatened with the loss of their religious, as they had lost already their political, existence. At the call of the doctor Akiba they once more appealed to the verdict of arms under the leadership of Barkochba, the Son of the Star, who claimed to be the long-expected Messiah. Nearly 600,000 Jews perished and the survivors were sold.

Hadrian's internal administration was sagacious. He relieved the provinces from those arrears of debt which had accumulated during sixteen years, and did away with the republican forms which since the time of Augustus had perpetuated the false image of Roman liberty. He divided the offices into those of the state, palace and army, the civil magistracies holding the highest rank and the military the lowest. For the transaction of business he established four chanceries, and invested the prætorian prefects with both civil and military authority. So they formed a sort of upper ministry. And lastly Salvius Julianus by command of the emperor formed a sort of code from existing edicts which, under the name of perpetual edict, acquired the force of law (131).

The army, like the palace and the higher administration of the government, was subjected to a severe reform. Hadrian made many regulations which have survived him, touching discipline, drill and the age at which a man became eligible to the different grades. He visited all the provinces one after the other, most of the time on foot, accompanied only by a few lawyers and artists. A number of cities were enriched by him with splendid monuments, as Nîmes, where he probably erected the amphitheatre in honor of Plotina; Athens, where he passed two winters; Alexandria; and Rome, which owes to him the castle of San Angelo (Moles Hadriani) and the bridge which connects the two banks. He encouraged commerce and industry, and rendered the slaves amenable to the courts alone, and not to the caprice of their masters.

The good deeds of this prince make us forget his shameful morals, which however were those of his age, the influence exercised over him by Antinous, of whom he eventually made a god, and certain acts of excessive severity. In



the early days of his reign, the senate executed four men of consular rank accused of conspiracy without even awaiting his orders. Toward the end of his life, after his successive adoption of Verus and Antoninus, plots real or imaginary began again and many senators were sacrificed. He died at Baia.

**Antoninus (138-161).** — Antoninus, a native of Nîmes, had been adopted by Hadrian on condition that he in turn would adopt Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. He reigned twenty-three years in profound peace, and received from his grateful contemporaries the surname of "Father of the human race." A wise economy in the administration of the finances enabled him to found useful institutions and to assist cities afflicted with some calamity, like Rome, Antioch, Narbonne and Rhodes, which had been ruined by fire and earthquake. "The wealth of a prince," he said, "is public happiness." Two conspiracies against him were discovered. Only their chiefs perished. A defence of Christianity composed by the philosopher Justinus obtained for the Christians, who were already numerous in Rome and in the provinces, toleration from the emperor and the magistrates. Antoninus carried on no important war, nothing more than petty expeditions for the maintenance of order on the frontiers.

**Marcus Aurelius (161-180).** — Marcus Aurelius, surnamed the Philosopher, undertook to continue the administration of his three predecessors. He had shared the title of Augustus with Verus, his son-in-law and adopted brother. He sent him to the East during a crisis, but Verus concerned himself at Antioch only with his debauches, and left the skilful Avidius Cassius to capture Ctesiphon and Seleucia. A terrible pestilence raged at Rome; earthquakes devastated the empire; the German tribes on the Danube rose in revolt. The Stoic philosopher who occupied the throne did not allow himself to be alarmed, and amid the perils of the war against the Marcomanni wrote the admirable maxims of Stoic wisdom contained in the twelve books of his work entitled *Meditations*.

Almost all the barbarian world was in commotion. The Sarmatian Roxolani, the Vandals and other tribes of whom we know only the names, crossed the Danube and penetrated even to the neighborhood of Aquileia. The two emperors marched against them, and the barbarians retreated without giving battle so as to secure their booty. A certain number

even accepted the lands which Marcus Aurelius gave them, or enrolled among the auxiliaries of the legions. Verus died on his return from this expedition. The as yet unconquered Germans appeared once more under the walls of Aquileia. In order to obtain the money required for this war, Marcus Aurelius sold the treasures and jewels of the imperial palace. He was obliged to arm the slaves and gladiators and enroll the barbarians (172). The enemy retreated. The emperor pursued the Quadi even to their own country, where on the banks of the Gran he incurred a serious danger. A storm accompanied by thunder and lightning saved him, and gave rise to the tradition of the Christian legion that hurled thunderbolts. A treaty of peace with many nations apparently gave a glorious termination to this war. From the banks of the Danube, Marcus Aurelius hurried to Syria to suppress the revolt of Cassius, who was killed by his soldiers. Almost immediately the Marcomanni, the Bastarnæ and the Goths resumed their incursions. The unhappy emperor, whom fate condemned to pass his life in the camp, hastened to march against them with his son Commodus. He died without having finished the war at Vindobona, now Vienna.

**Commodus (180-192).** — Commodus, aged nineteen years, concluded a hasty peace with the Marcomanni and the Quadi, took 20,000 of those barbarians into the service of the empire, and returned to Rome to contend more than 700 times in the arena, to drive chariots and play the part of Hercules. Perennis, the prefect of the guards on whom at first devolved the cares of government, was massacred in 186. He was replaced, both as prætorian prefect and imperial favorite, by the freedman Cleander, a Phrygian, who made money out of the life and honor of the citizens. Three years later the cruel and avaricious favorite was killed in a popular sedition which plague and famine had excited. Then Commodus launched sentences of death against the most virtuous citizens, against his relatives, against the senate, even against the great juriconsult Salvius Julianus and allowed the prætorians the utmost license. As those nearest to him were the most endangered, it was their hand which smote him. His concubine Marcia, the chamberlain Electus, and the prefect of the guards Lætus, whom he intended to put to death, had him strangled by an athlete.