

*Considerations on the Causes of*  
THE GREATNESS OF THE ROMANS  
AND THEIR DECLINE

MONTESQUIEU

*Translated,*  
*with Introduction and Notes, by*

DAVID LOWENTHAL

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## CHAPTER I

### 1. BEGINNINGS OF ROME

### 2. ITS WARS

We should not form the same impression of the city of Rome in its beginnings<sup>a</sup> as we get from the cities we see today, except perhaps for those of the Crimea, which were built to hold booty, cattle and the fruits of the field. The early names of the main places in Rome are all related to this practice.

The city did not even have streets, unless you call the continuation of paths that led to it by that name. The houses were located without any particular order, and were very

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<sup>a</sup> Montesquieu, oddly enough, cites no dates. Of the twenty-three chapters, seven are clearly general or nonchronological in content (II, III, VI, VIII, IX, X, and XVIII). Present historians would date the stretch of events covered by the others in something like the following manner: I (753-387 B.C.); IV (fourth century to 201 B.C.); V (201-168 B.C.); VII (89-63 B.C.); XI (first half of first century B.C.); XII (44-42 B.C.); XIII (42 B.C. to 14 A.D.); XIV (14-37 A.D.); XV (37-138 A.D.); XVI (138-282 A.D.); XVII (285-378 A.D.); XIX (end of fourth century and second half of fifth century A.D.); XX (527-565 A.D.); XXI (565-610 A.D.); XXII (610-1300 A.D.); XXIII (seventh century to 1400 A.D.). Chapters XXI and XXII are both historical and general.

small, for the men were always at work or in the public square, and hardly ever remained home.

But the greatness<sup>b</sup> of Rome soon appeared in its public edifices. The works<sup>1</sup> which conveyed and today still convey the strongest impression of its power were produced under the kings. Already the Romans were beginning to build the eternal city.

To obtain citizens, wives and lands, Romulus and his successors were almost always at war with their neighbors. Amid great rejoicing they returned to the city with spoils of grain and flocks from the conquered peoples. Thus originated the triumphs, which subsequently were the main cause of the greatness this city attained.

Rome markedly increased its strength by its union with the Sabines—a tough and warlike people, like the Lacedaemonians from whom they were descended. Romulus<sup>2</sup> adopted their buckler, which was a large one, in place of the small Argive buckler he had used till then. And it should be noted that the main reason for the Romans becoming masters of the world was that, having fought successively against all peoples, they always gave up their own practices as soon as they found better ones.

In those days in the republics of Italy it was thought that the treaties they made with a king did not bind them toward his successor. This was a kind of law of nations for them.<sup>3</sup> Thus, whoever had fallen under the domination of one Roman king claimed to be free under another, and wars constantly engendered wars.

<sup>b</sup> I have, throughout, translated *grandeur* and *décadence* by “greatness” and “decline” because “grandeur” and “decadence” have a somewhat more specialized meaning today. On the other hand, I have retained “considerations” in the title, despite its rarity today, because Montesquieu himself seems to distinguish it, in some of his titles, from the more common “reflections.”

Numa's long and peaceful reign was ideal for keeping Rome in a state of mediocrity, and if it had then had a less limited territory and greater power, its fate would probably have been decided once and for all.

One of the causes of its success was that its kings were all great men. Nowhere else in history can you find an uninterrupted succession of such statesmen and captains.

At the birth of societies, the leaders of republics create the institutions; thereafter, it is the institutions that form the leaders of republics.

Tarquin seized the throne without being elected by either the senate or the people.<sup>4</sup> Power was becoming hereditary: he made it absolute. These two revolutions were soon followed by a third.

In violating Lucretia, his son Sextus did the sort of thing that has almost always caused tyrants to be expelled from the city they ruled. Such an action makes the people keenly aware of their servitude, and they immediately go to extremes.

A people can easily endure the exaction of new tributes: it does not know whether some benefit may come to it from the use to which the money is put. But when it receives an affront, it is aware of nothing but its misfortune, and begins thinking of all the possible evils to which it may be subjected.

It is true, however, that the death of Lucretia was only the occasion of the revolution which occurred. For a proud, enterprising and bold people, confined within walls, must necessarily either shake off its yoke or become gentler in its ways.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>c</sup> The French word *moeurs* signifies the “morals,” “moral customs, manners” or “ways” of societies and individuals; it refers to both expected and actual behavior, as well as to the inner character of which they are expressions. In each case I have used one of these four terms to express its meaning, depending on context.

One of two things had to happen: either Rome would change its government, or it would remain a small and poor monarchy.

Modern history furnishes us with an example of what happened at that time in Rome, and this is well worth noting. For the occasions which produce great changes are different, but, since men have had the same passions at all times, the causes are always the same.

Just as Henry VII, king of England, increased the power of the commons in order to degrade the lords, so Servius Tullius, before him, had extended the privileges of the people<sup>5</sup> in order to reduce the senate. But the people, at once becoming bolder, overthrew the one and the other monarchy.

The portrait painted of Tarquin is not flattering; his name did not escape any of the orators who had something to say against tyranny. But his conduct before his misfortune—which we know he himself foresaw, his mild treatment of conquered peoples, his generosity toward the soldiers, the art he had of interesting so many people in his preservation, his public works, his courage in war, his constancy in misfortune, a war that he waged or had waged against the Roman people for twenty years when he had neither realm nor wealth, his continual resourcefulness—all clearly show that he was not a contemptible man.

The places bestowed by posterity are subject, like others, to the caprice of fortune. Woe to the reputation of any prince who is oppressed by a party that becomes dominant, or who has tried to destroy a prejudice that survives him!

Having ousted the kings, Rome established annual consuls, and this too helped it reach its high degree of power. During their lifetime, princes go through periods of ambition, followed by other passions and by idleness itself. But, with the republic having leaders who changed every year and who sought to signalize their magistracy so that they might obtain new ones, ambition did not lose even a moment. They in-

duced the senate to propose war to the people, and showed it new enemies every day.

This body was already rather inclined that way itself. Wearing incessantly by the complaints and demands of the people, it sought to distract them from their unrest by occupying them abroad.<sup>6</sup>

Now war was almost always agreeable to the people, because, by the wise distribution of booty, the means had been found of making it useful to them.

Since Rome was a city without commerce, and almost without arts, pillage was the only means individuals had of enriching themselves.

The manner of pillaging was therefore brought under control, and it was done with much the same discipline as is now practiced among the inhabitants of Little Tartary.<sup>4</sup>

The booty was assembled<sup>7</sup> and then distributed to the soldiers. None was ever lost, for prior to setting out each man had sworn not to take any for himself. And the Romans were the most religious people in the world when it came to an oath—which always formed the nerve of their military discipline.

Finally, the citizens who remained in the city also enjoyed the fruits of victory. Part of the land of the conquered people was confiscated and divided into two parts. One was sold for public profit, the other distributed to poor citizens subject to a rent paid to the republic.

Since only a conquest or victory could obtain the honor of a triumph for the consuls, they waged war with great impetuosity. They went straight for the enemy, and strength decided the matter immediately.

Rome was therefore in an endless and constantly violent war. Now a nation forever at war, and by the very principle of its government, must necessarily do one of two things.

<sup>4</sup> Little Tartary: southern Russia, from the Crimea to the Caucasus.

Either it must perish, or it must overcome all the others which were only at war intermittently and were therefore never as ready to attack or as prepared to defend themselves as it was.

In this way the Romans acquired a profound knowledge of military art. In transient wars, most of the examples of conduct are lost; peace brings other ideas, and one's faults and even one's virtues are forgotten.

Another consequence of the principle of continual war was that the Romans never made peace except as victors. In effect, why make a shameful peace with one people to begin attacking another?

With this idea in mind, they always increased their demands in proportion to their defeats. By so doing they consternated their conquerors and imposed on themselves a greater necessity to conquer.

Since they were always exposed to the most frightful acts of vengeance, constancy and valor became necessary to them. And among them these virtues could not be distinguished from the love of oneself, of one's family, of one's country, and of all that is most dear to men.

The peoples of Italy made no use of machines for carrying on sieges.<sup>8</sup> In addition, since the soldiers fought without pay, they could not be retained for long before any one place. Thus, few of their wars were decisive. They fought to pillage the enemy's camp or his lands—after which the victor and vanquished each withdrew to his own city. This is what produced the resistance of the peoples of Italy, and, at the same time, the obstinacy of the Romans in subjugating them. This is what gave the Romans victories which did not corrupt them, and which let them remain poor.

If they had rapidly conquered all the neighboring cities, they would have been in decline at the arrival of Pyrrhus, the Gauls, and Hannibal. And following the fate of nearly

all the states in the world, they would have passed too quickly from poverty to riches, and from riches to corruption.

But, always striving and always meeting obstacles, Rome made its power felt without being able to extend it, and, within a very small orbit, practiced the virtues which were to be so fatal to the world.

All the peoples of Italy were not equally warlike. The Tuscans had grown soft from their affluence and luxury. The Tarentines, Capuans, and nearly all the cities of Campania and Magna Graecia<sup>9</sup> languished in idleness and pleasures. But the Latins, Hernicans, Sabines, Aequians, and Volscians loved war passionately. They were all around Rome. Their resistance to it was unbelievable, and they outdid it in obstinacy.

The Latin cities were colonies of Alba founded<sup>9</sup> by Latinus Sylvius. Aside from a common origin with the Romans, they also had common rites, and Servius Tullius<sup>10</sup> had induced them to build a temple in Rome to serve as the center of the union of the two peoples. Having lost a great battle near Lake Regillus, they were subjected to an alliance and military association<sup>11</sup> with the Romans.

During the short time the tyranny of the decemvirs lasted, we clearly see the degree to which the extension of Rome's power depended on its liberty. The state seemed to have lost<sup>12</sup> the soul which animated it.

There were then only two sorts of men in the city: those who endured servitude, and those who sought to impose it for their own interests. The senators withdrew from Rome as from a foreign city, and the neighboring peoples met with no resistance anywhere.

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<sup>9</sup> Campania: a district of western Italy below Latium; Magna Graecia: southern Italy, where there were numerous colonies founded by the Greeks.

When the senate had the means of paying the soldiers, the siege of Veii was undertaken. It lasted ten years. The Romans employed a new art and a new way of waging war. Their successes were more brilliant; they profited more from their victories; they made larger conquests; they sent out more colonies. In short, the taking of Veii was a kind of revolution.

But their labors were not lessened. The very fact that they struck harder blows against the Tuscans, Aequians, and Volscians caused their allies—the Latins and Hernicans, who had the same arms and discipline they did—to abandon them. It caused the Samnites, the most warlike of all the peoples of Italy, to wage war against them furiously.

With the establishment of military pay, the senate no longer distributed the lands of conquered peoples to the soldiers. It imposed other conditions on these peoples; it required them, for example, to furnish<sup>13</sup> the army with its pay for a certain time, and to give it grain and clothing.

The capture of Rome by the Gauls deprived it of none of its strength. Dispersed rather than vanquished, almost the whole army withdrew to Veii. The people took refuge in the neighboring cities; and the burning of the city only amounted to the burning of some shepherds' cabins.

#### NOTES

1. See the amazement of Dionysius of Halicarnassus at the sewers built by Tarquin; *Roman Antiquities*, III (67). They still exist.
2. Plutarch, *Life of Romulus* (21).
3. This is shown by the whole history of the kings of Rome.
4. The senate named a magistrate of the interregnum who elected the king; this election had to be confirmed by the people. See Dionysius of Halicarnassus, II (40), III, and IV.
5. See Zonaras (VII, 9) and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, IV (43).

6. Besides, the authority of the senate was less limited in external affairs than in those of the city.
7. See Polybius, X (16).
8. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, IX (68), says so expressly, and it is shown by history. They did not know how to make galleries to shelter themselves from the besieged; they tried to take cities by scaling the walls. Ephorus recorded that Artemon, an engineer, invented heavy machines for battering down the strongest walls. Pericles used them first at the siege of Samos, according to Plutarch's *Life of Pericles* (27).
9. As we see in the treatise entitled *Origin of the Roman People* (17), believed to be by Aurelius Victor.
10. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, IV (26).
11. See one of the treaties made with them, in Dionysius of Halicarnassus, VI (115).
12. On the pretext of giving the people written laws, they seized the government. See Dionysius of Halicarnassus, XI.
13. See the treaties that were made.

CHAPTER II

THE ART OF WAR AMONG  
THE ROMANS

Destined for war, and regarding it as the only art, the Romans put their whole spirit and all their thoughts into perfecting it. It was doubtlessly a god, says Vegetius,<sup>1</sup> who inspired them with the idea of the legion.

They judged it necessary to give the soldiers of the legion offensive and defensive arms stronger and heavier<sup>2</sup> than those of any other people.

But since warfare requires things that a heavy troop cannot do, they wanted the legion to contain in its midst a light troop that could sally forth into battle, and, if necessary, withdraw to it. They also wanted the legion to have cavalry, archers,<sup>a</sup> and slingers to pursue fugitives and consummate the victory. They wanted it to be defended by every type of war machinery, drawn along with it. They wanted it to entrench every evening and become, as Vegetius<sup>3</sup> says, a kind of fortress.

So that they could handle heavier arms than other men, they had to make themselves more than men. This they did by continual labor, which increased their strength, and by

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<sup>a</sup> The term translated as "archers" is *hommes de trait* and actually refers to soldiers who shot or hurled various kinds of missiles.

exercises giving them dexterity, which is nothing more than the proper use of one's strength.

We observe today that our armies suffer great losses from the soldiers laboring<sup>4</sup> excessively, yet it was by enormous labor that the Romans preserved themselves. The reason is, I believe, that their toil was continual, whereas our soldiers constantly go from extremes of labor to extremes of idleness—which is the best way in the world to destroy them.

I must report here what the authors<sup>5</sup> tell us about the education of Roman soldiers. They were accustomed to marching at military pace, that is, to covering twenty miles, and sometimes twenty-four, in five hours. During these marches, they had to carry sixty-pound packs. They were kept in the habit of running and jumping completely armed. In their exercises they used<sup>6</sup> swords, javelins, and arrows double the weight of ordinary arms, and these exercises were continual.

The camp was not their only military school. There was a place in the city where citizens went to exercise (the Campus Martius). After their labors,<sup>7</sup> they threw themselves into the Tiber to keep up their swimming ability and clean off the dust and sweat.

We no longer have the right idea about physical exercises. A man who applies himself to them excessively seems contemptible to us because their only purpose now is enjoyment. For the ancients, however, all exercises, including the dance, were part of the military art.

With us it has even come to pass that too studied a dexterity in the use of military weapons has become ridiculous. For since the introduction of the custom of single combat, fencing has come to be regarded as the science of quarrelers or cowards.

Those who criticize Homer for usually exalting the physical strength, dexterity or agility of his heroes should find Sallust quite ridiculous when he praises Pompey<sup>8</sup> "for run-

ning, jumping and carrying a load as well as any man of his time."

Whenever the Romans believed themselves in danger or wanted to make up for some loss, their usual practice was to tighten military discipline. Is it necessary to wage war against the Latins—peoples as inured to war as themselves? Manlius, intent on strengthening his authority, has his own son put to death for conquering the enemy without an order to do so. Are they defeated at Numantia? Scipio Aemilianus immediately deprives them of everything that had made them soft.<sup>9</sup> Have the Roman legions been forced to submit in Numidia? Metellus repairs this shame as soon as he has made them revive their old institutions. To defeat the Cimbri and the Teutones, Marius begins by turning rivers from their course. And when the soldiers of Sulla's army are afraid of the war against Mithridates, he works them so hard<sup>10</sup> that they beg for combat as an end to their pains.

Publius Nasica made them construct a fleet without needing one. Idleness was feared more than their enemies.

Aulus Gellius<sup>11, b</sup> gives rather poor reasons for the Roman custom of bleeding soldiers who had committed some offense. The true reason is that weakening them was a means of degrading them, since strength is a soldier's main attribute.

Men so hardened were general healthy. We do not notice in the authors that the Roman armies, which made war in so many climates, lost many men through sickness. But today it happens almost continually that armies dissolve, so to speak, in a campaign without fighting a single battle.

Among us desertions are frequent because soldiers are the vilest part of each nation, and no one nation has or believes it has an unquestionable advantage over the others. With the Romans they were more rare. Soldiers drawn from

<sup>b</sup> Aulus Gellius was a Latin author and grammarian (c. 130-180 A.D.).



the midst of a people that was so bold, so proud, so sure of commanding others could scarcely think of humbling themselves to the point of ceasing to be Romans.

Since their armies were not large,<sup>c</sup> it was easy to provide for their subsistence. The commander could know them better, and detected offenses and breaches of discipline more easily.

The strength they derived from their exercises and the admirable roads they had constructed enabled them to make long and rapid marches.<sup>12</sup> Their unexpected appearance chilled the spirit. They showed up particularly after a setback, when their enemies were displaying the negligence that usually follows victory.

In our battles today, an individual soldier hardly has any confidence except when he is part of a multitude. But each Roman, more robust and inured to war than his opponent, always relied on himself. Courage—the virtue which is the consciousness of one's own strength—came to him naturally.

Since their troops were always the best disciplined, it was unusual, even in the most unfavorable battle, if they did not rally somewhere, or if disorder did not arise somewhere among their opponents. The histories, therefore, constantly show them wresting victory from the hands of the enemy in the end, although at first they may have been overcome by his numbers or his ardor.

Their chief care was to examine in what way the enemy might be superior to them, and they corrected the defect immediately. They became accustomed to seeing blood and wounds at their gladiatorial exhibitions, which they acquired from the Etruscans.<sup>13</sup>

The cutting swords<sup>14</sup> of the Gauls and the elephants of Pyrrhus surprised them only once. They made up for

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<sup>c</sup> An army, consisting of two legions, had about twelve thousand Romans in it and an equal number of allies.

the weakness of their cavalry,<sup>15</sup> first by removing the bridles of their horses so that their impetuosity could not be restrained, then by introducing velites.<sup>16</sup> When they became familiar with the Spanish sword,<sup>17</sup> they abandoned their own. They got around the skill of pilots by inventing a device Polybius describes to us.<sup>d</sup> In sum, as Josephus says,<sup>19</sup> war was a meditation for them, and peace an exercise.

If nature or its institutions gave a nation some particular advantage, the Romans immediately made use of it. They left no stone unturned to get Numidian horses, Cretan archers, Balearic slingers, and Rhodian vessels.

In short, no nation ever prepared for war with so much prudence, or waged it with so much audacity.

#### NOTES

1. II, 1 (II, 21).
2. See what the arms of the Roman soldier were in Polybius (VI, 21) and in Josephus, *The Jewish War*, II (III, 5, 6). The latter says there is little difference between packhorses and Roman soldiers. "They carry," Cicero tells us, "food for more than fifteen days, everything they will use, and whatever is necessary to fortify themselves. As for their arms, they are no more encumbered by them than by their hands." *Tusculan Disputations*, III (II, 16).
3. II, 25.
4. Especially from digging up the ground.
5. See Vegetius, I (9). See in Livy, XXVI (51), the exercises Scipio Africanus made his soldiers do after the capture of New Carthage. Marius, in spite of his old age, went to the Campus Martius every day. Pompey, at the age of fifty-eight, went in full armor to fight with the young men; he mounted his horse, rode at full speed, and hurled his javelins. Plutarch, *Lives of Marius and Pompey*.

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<sup>d</sup> Polybius, I, 22.

6. Vegetius, I (11-14).
7. Vegetius I (10).
8. *Cum alacribus saltu, cum velocibus cursu, cum validis vecte certabat.* (He vied in leaping with the most active, in running with the swiftest, and in exercises of strength with the most robust). Fragment of Sallust, reported by Vegetius, I, 9.
9. He sold all the beasts of burden of the army, and made each soldier carry thirty days of grain and seven stakes. Florus, *Epitome*, LVII.
10. Frontinus, *Strategems*, I, 11.
11. X, 8.
12. See especially the defeat of Hasdrubal and their diligence against Viriathus.
13. Fragment of Nicolaus of Damascus, X, taken from Athenaeus, IV (39). Before the soldiers left for the army, they were shown a gladiatorial combat. Julius Capitolinus, *Lives of Maximus and Balbinus*.
14. The Romans held out their javelins, which received the strokes of the Gallic swords, and blunted them.
15. Nevertheless, it was better than the cavalry of the small peoples of Italy. It was formed from the leading citizens, for each of whom a horse was maintained at public expense. When dismounted, there was no more redoubtable infantry, and very often it was decisive in achieving victory.
16. These were young men, lightly armed, and the most agile in the legion, who, at the slightest signal, jumped on the rump of the horses, or fought on foot. Valerius Maximus, II (3); Livy, XXVI (4).
17. Fragment of Polybius cited by Suidas in connection with the word μάχιρα.
18. *The Jewish War*, II (III, 5, 6).

## HOW THE ROMANS WERE ABLE TO EXPAND

Since all the peoples of Europe these days have practically the same arts, the same arms, the same discipline, and the same way of making war, the marvelous good fortune of the Romans seems incredible to us. Besides, such great differences in power exist today that a small state cannot possibly rise by its own efforts from the lowly position in which Providence has placed it.

This calls for reflection; otherwise, we would see events without understanding them, and, by not being aware of the difference in situations, would believe that the men we read about in ancient history are of another breed than ourselves.

In Europe constant experience has shown that a prince who has a million subjects cannot maintain more than ten thousand troops without ruining himself. Only great nations therefore have armies.

It was not the same in the ancient republics. Today the proportion of soldiers to the rest of the people is one to a hundred, whereas with them it could easily be one to eight.

The founders of the ancient republics had made an equal partition of the lands. This alone produced a powerful people, that is, a well-regulated society. It also produced a good army, everyone having an equal, and very great, interest in defending his country.

When the laws were no longer stringently observed, a situation just like the one we are in came about. The avarice of some individuals and the prodigality of others caused landed property to pass into the hands of a few, and the arts were at once introduced for the mutual needs of rich and poor. As a result, almost no citizens or soldiers were left. Landed properties previously destined for their support were employed for the support of slaves and artisans—instruments of the luxury of the new owners. And without this the state, which had to endure in spite of its disorder, would have perished. Before the corruption set in, the primary incomes of the state were divided among the soldiers, that is, the farmers. When the republic was corrupt, they passed at once to rich men, who gave them back to the slaves and artisans. And by means of taxes a part was taken away for the support of the soldiers.

Now men like these were scarcely fit for war. They were cowardly, and already corrupted by the luxury of the cities, and often by their craft itself. Besides, since they had no country in the proper sense of the term, and could pursue their trade anywhere, they had little to lose or to preserve.

In a census of Rome<sup>1</sup> taken some time after the expulsion of the kings, and in the one Demetrius of Phalerum took at Athens,<sup>2</sup> nearly the same number of inhabitants was found. Rome had a population of four hundred and forty thousand, Athens four hundred and thirty-one thousand. But this census of Rome came at a time when its institutions were vigorous, and that of Athens at a time when it was entirely corrupt. It was discovered that the number of citizens at the age of puberty constituted one fourth of Rome's inhabitants and a little less than one twentieth of Athens'. At these different times, therefore, the power of Rome was to the power of Athens nearly as one quarter to one twentieth—that is, it was five times larger.

When the kings Agis and Cleomenes realized that instead

of the nine thousand citizens Sparta had in Lycurgus' time,<sup>3</sup> only seven hundred were left, hardly a hundred of whom were landowners,<sup>4</sup> and that the rest were only a mob of cowards, they set out to restore the laws<sup>5</sup> in this regard. Lacedaemon regained the power it once had and again became formidable to all the Greeks.

It was the equal partition of lands that at first enabled Rome to rise from its lowly position; and this was obvious when it became corrupt.

It was a small republic when, after the Latins refused to contribute the troops they had promised, ten legions were raised in the city on the spot.<sup>6</sup> "Today's Rome," says Livy, "even though the whole world cannot contain it, could hardly do as much if an enemy suddenly appeared before its walls. This is a certain indication that we have not become greater at all, and that we have only increased the luxury and riches that obsess us."

"Tell me," said Tiberius Gracchus to the nobles,<sup>7</sup> "who is worth more: a citizen or a perpetual slave; a soldier, or a man useless for war? In order to have a few more acres of land than other citizens, do you wish to renounce the hope of conquering the rest of the world, or to place yourself in danger of seeing these lands you refuse us snatched away by enemies?"

#### NOTES

1. This is the census of which Dionysius of Halicarnassus speaks in IX, art. 25, and which seems to me to be the same as the one he reports toward the end of his sixth book, which was taken sixteen years after the expulsion of the kings.
2. Ctesicles, in Athenaeus, VI.
3. These were citizens of the city, properly called Spartans. Lycurgus made nine thousand shares for them; he gave thirty thousand to the other inhabitants. See Plutarch. *Life of Lycurgus* (8).

4. See Plutarch, *Lives of Agis and Cleomenes*.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Livy, First Decade, VII (25). This was some time after the capture of Rome, under the consulate of L. Furius Camillus and Ap. Claudius Crassus.
7. Appian, *The Civil War* (I, 11).

## CHAPTER IV

## 1. THE GAULS

## 2. PYRRHUS

## 3. COMPARISON OF CARTHAGE

## AND ROME

## 4. HANNIBAL'S WAR

The Romans had many wars with the Gauls. The love of glory, the contempt for death, and the stubborn will to conquer were the same in the two peoples. But their arms were different. The buckler of the Gauls was small, and their sword poor. They were therefore treated in much the same way as the Mexicans were treated by the Spaniards in recent centuries. And the surprising thing is that these peoples, whom the Romans met in almost all places, and at almost all times, permitted themselves to be destroyed one after the other without ever knowing, seeking or forestalling the cause of their misfortunes.

Pyrrhus came to make war on the Romans at a time when they were in a position to resist him and to learn from

his victories. He taught them to entrench, and to choose and arrange a camp. He accustomed them to elephants and prepared them for greater wars.

Pyrrhus' greatness consisted only in his personal qualities.<sup>1</sup> Plutarch tells us that he was forced to undertake the Macedonian war because he could not support the eight thousand infantry and five hundred cavalry that he had.<sup>2</sup> This prince—ruler of a small state of which nothing was heard after him—was an adventurer who constantly undertook new enterprises because he could exist only while undertaking them.

His allies, the Tarentines, had strayed far from the institutions of their ancestors,<sup>3</sup> the Lacedaemonians. He could have done great things with the Samnites, but the Romans had all but destroyed them.

Having become rich sooner than Rome, Carthage had also been corrupted sooner. In Rome, public office could be obtained only through virtue, and brought with it no benefit other than honor and being preferred for further toils, while in Carthage everything the public could give to individuals was for sale, and all service rendered by individuals was paid for by the public.

The tyranny of a prince does no more to ruin a state than does indifference to the common good to ruin a republic. The advantage of a free state is that revenues are better administered in it. But what if they are more poorly administered? The advantage of a free state is that there are no favorites in it. But when that is not the case—when it is necessary to line the pockets of the friends and relatives, not of a prince, but of all those who participate in the government—all is lost. There is greater danger in the laws being evaded in a free state than in their being violated by a prince, for a prince is always the foremost citizen of his state, and has more interest in preserving it than anyone else.

The old morals, a certain custom favoring poverty, made

fortunes at Rome nearly equal, but at Carthage individuals had the riches of kings.

Of the two factions that ruled in Carthage, one always wanted peace, the other war, so that it was impossible there to enjoy the former or do well at the latter.

While war at once united all interests in Rome, it separated them still further in Carthage.<sup>4</sup>

In states governed by a prince, dissensions are easily pacified because he has in his hands a coercive power that brings the two parties together. But in a republic they are more durable, because the evil usually attacks the very power that could cure it.

In Rome, governed by laws, the people allowed the senate to direct public affairs. In Carthage, governed by abuses, the people wanted to do everything themselves.

Carthage, which made war against Roman poverty with its opulence, was at a disadvantage by that very fact. Gold and silver are exhausted, but virtue, constancy, strength and poverty never are.

The Romans were ambitious from pride, the Carthaginians from avarice; the Romans wanted to command, the Carthaginians to acquire. Constantly calculating receipts and expenses, the latter always made war without loving it.

Lost battles, the decrease in population, the enfeeblement of commerce, the exhaustion of the public treasury, the revolt of neighboring nations could make Carthage accept the most severe conditions of peace. But Rome was not guided by experiences of goods and evils. Only its glory determined its actions, and since it could not imagine itself existing without commanding, no hope or fear could induce it to make a peace it did not impose.

There is nothing so powerful as a republic in which the laws are observed not through fear, not through reason, but through passion—which was the case with Rome and Lace-

daemon. For then all the strength a faction could have is joined to the wisdom of a good government.

The Carthaginians used foreign troops, and the Romans employed their own. Since the latter never regarded the vanquished as anything but instruments for further triumphs, they made soldiers of all the peoples they had overcome, and the more trouble they had in conquering them, the more they judged them suitable for incorporation into their republic. Thus we see the Samnites, who were subjugated only after twenty-four triumphs,<sup>5</sup> become the auxiliaries of the Romans. And some time before the Second Punic War they drew from them and their allies—that is, from a country scarcely larger than the states of the pope and of Naples—seven hundred thousand infantry and seventy thousand cavalry to oppose the Gauls.<sup>6</sup>

At the height of the Second Punic War, Rome always had from twenty-two to twenty-four legions in action. Yet it appears from Livy that the census then indicated only about one hundred and thirty-seven thousand citizens.

Carthage employed greater forces for attacking, Rome for defending itself. The latter, as has just been said, armed a prodigious number of men against the Gauls and Hannibal, who attacked it, and sent out only two legions against the greatest kings—a policy which perpetuated its forces.

Carthage's situation at home was less secure than Rome's. Rome had thirty colonies around it, which were like ramparts.<sup>7</sup> Prior to the battle of Cannae, no ally had abandoned it, for the Samnites and the other peoples of Italy were accustomed to its domination.

Since most of the cities of Africa were lightly fortified, they surrendered at once to whoever came to take them. Thus, all who disembarked there—Agathocles, Regulus, Scipio—immediately drove Carthage to despair.

The ills which befell the Carthaginians throughout the

war waged against them by the first Scipio can only be attributed to a bad government. Their city and even their armies were starving, while the Romans had an abundance of all things.<sup>8</sup>

Among the Carthaginians, armies which had been defeated became more insolent. Sometimes they crucified their generals, and punished them for their own cowardice. Among the Romans, the consul decimated the troops that had fled, and led them back against the enemy.

The rule of the Carthaginians was very harsh.<sup>9</sup> So severely had they tormented the peoples of Spain that when the Romans arrived there they were regarded as liberators. And, if we bear in mind the immense sums it cost them to support a war in which they were defeated, we plainly see that injustice is a bad manager, and that it does not even accomplish its own ends.

The founding of Alexandria had considerably diminished the commerce of Carthage. In early times superstition practically banished foreigners from Egypt, and, when the Persians conquered it, they had thought only of weakening their new subjects. But under the Greek kings Egypt carried on almost all the commerce of the world, and that of Carthage began to decline.

Commercial powers can continue in a state of mediocrity a long time, but their greatness is of short duration. They rise little by little, without anyone noticing, for they engage in no particular action that resounds and signals their power. But when things have come to the point where people cannot help but see what has happened, everyone seeks to deprive this nation of an advantage it has obtained, so to speak, only by surprise.

The Carthaginian cavalry was superior to the Roman for two reasons. First, the Numidian and Spanish horses were better than those of Italy; second, the Roman cavalry was

poorly armed, for it was only during the wars the Romans fought in Greece that this feature was changed, as we learn from Polybius.<sup>10</sup>

In the First Punic War, Regulus was beaten as soon as the Carthaginians chose to bring their cavalry into combat on the plains, and, in the Second, Hannibal owed his principal victories to his Numidians.<sup>11</sup>

After Scipio conquered Spain and made an alliance with Masinissa, he took this superiority away from the Carthaginians. It was the Numidian cavalry that won the battle of Zama and finished the war.

The Carthaginians had more experience on the sea and could manoeuvre better than the Romans, but I think this advantage was not so great then as it would be today.

Since the ancients did not have the compass, they could hardly navigate anywhere but near the coasts. Also, they used only boats with oars, which were small and flat. Practically every inlet was a harbor for them. The skill of pilots was very limited, and their manoeuvres amounted to very little. Thus Aristotle said<sup>12</sup> that it was useless to have a corps of sailors, and that laborers sufficed for the job.

The art was so imperfect that they could scarcely do with a thousand oars what today is done with a hundred.<sup>13</sup>

Large vessels were disadvantageous, since the difficulty the crew had in moving them made them unable to execute the necessary turns. Anthony had a disastrous experience<sup>14</sup> with them at Actium; his ships could not move, while Augustus' lighter ones attacked them on all sides.

Because ancient vessels were rowed, the lighter ones easily shattered the oars of the larger ones, which then became nothing more than immobile objects, like our dismayed vessels today.

Since the invention of the compass, things have changed. Oars have been abandoned,<sup>15</sup> the coasts have been left be-

hind, great vessels have been built. The ship has become more complicated, and sailing practices have multiplied.

The invention of powder had an unsuspected effect. It made the strength of navies consist more than ever in nautical art. For to resist the cannon's violence and avoid being subjected to superior firing power, great ships were needed. But the level of the art had to correspond to the magnitude of the ship.

The small vessels of former days used to grapple on to each other suddenly, and the soldiers of both sides did the fighting. A whole land army was placed on a fleet. In the naval battle that Regulus and his colleague won, we see one hundred and thirty thousand Romans fighting against one hundred and fifty thousand Carthaginians. At that time soldiers meant a great deal and an expert crew little; at present, soldiers mean nothing, or little, and an expert crew a great deal.

The victory of the consul Duilius brings out this difference well. The Romans had no knowledge of navigation. A Carthaginian galley ran aground on their coasts; they used it as a model to build their own. In three months' time, their sailors were trained, their fleet constructed and equipped. It put to sea, found the Carthaginian navy and defeated it.

At present, a lifetime hardly suffices for a prince to create a fleet capable of appearing before a power which already rules the sea. It is perhaps the only thing that money alone cannot do. And if, in our day, a great prince immediately succeeds at it,<sup>16</sup> others have learned from experience that his example is more to be admired than followed.<sup>17</sup>

The Second Punic War is so famous that everybody knows it. When we carefully examine the multitude of obstacles confronting Hannibal, all of which this extraordinary man surmounted, we have before us the finest spectacle presented by antiquity.

Rome was a marvel of constancy. After the battles of Ticinus, Trebia, and Lake Trasimene, after Cannae more dismal still, abandoned by almost all the peoples of Italy, it did not sue for peace. The reason is that the senate never departed from its old maxims.<sup>a</sup> It dealt with Hannibal as it had previously dealt with Pyrrhus, with whom it had refused to make any accommodation so long as he remained in Italy. And I find in Dionysius of Halicarnassus<sup>18</sup> that, at the time of the negotiation with Coriolanus, the senate declared that it would not violate its old practices, that the Roman people could not make peace while enemies were on its soil, but that, if the Volscians withdrew, their just demands would be met.

Rome was saved by the strength of its institutions. After the battle of Cannae not even the women were permitted to shed tears. The senate refused to ransom the prisoners, and sent the miserable remains of the army to make war in Sicily, without pay or any military honor, until such time as Hannibal was expelled from Italy.

In another instance, the consul Terentius Varro had fled shamefully to Venusia.<sup>b</sup> This man, who was of the lowest birth, had been elevated to the consulate only to mortify the nobility. But the senate did not wish to enjoy this unhappy triumph. Seeing how necessary it was on this occasion to win the confidence of the people, it went before Varro and thanked him for not having despaired of the republic.

Usually it is not the real loss sustained in battle (such as that of several thousands of men) which proves fatal to a

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<sup>a</sup> The French word *maxime* means "rule of conduct"; "maxim," in English, still has this as one of its meanings, and, for the sake of simplicity and consistency, will be used throughout.

<sup>b</sup> Venusia: an Italian city of Apulia, some distance south of Rome.

state, but the imagined loss and the discouragement, which deprive it of the very strength fortune had left it.

There are things that everybody says because they were once said.<sup>c</sup> People believe that Hannibal made a signal error in not having laid siege to Rome after the battle of Cannae. It is true that at first the terror in Rome was extreme, but the consternation of a warlike people, which almost always turns into courage, is different from that of a vile populace, which senses only its weakness. A proof that Hannibal would not have succeeded is that the Romans were still able to send assistance everywhere.

People say further that Hannibal made a great mistake in leading his army to Capua, where it grew soft. But they fail to see that they stop short of the true cause. Would not the soldiers of his army have found Capua everywhere, having become rich after so many victories? On a similar occasion, Alexander, who was commanding his own subjects, made use of an expedient that Hannibal, who had only mercenary troops, could not use. He had the baggage of his soldiers set on fire, and burned all their riches and his too. We are told that Kuli Khan,<sup>d</sup> after his conquest of India, left each soldier with only a hundred rupees of silver.<sup>19</sup>

It was Hannibal's conquests themselves that began to change the fortunes of this war. He had not been sent to Italy by the magistrates of Carthage; he received very little help, whether because of the jealousy of one party or the overconfidence of the other. While he retained his whole army, he defeated the Romans. But when he had to put garrisons in the cities, defend his allies, besiege strongholds or prevent

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<sup>c</sup> For this reference and the one in the next paragraph, see Livy, XXII, 51, and XXIII, 18.

<sup>d</sup> Kuli Khan: Nadir Shah, who was shah of Iran from 1736-47. A.D.



them from being besieged, his forces were found to be too small, and he lost a large part of his army piecemeal. Conquests are easy to make, because they are made with all one's forces; they are difficult to preserve because they are defended with only a part of one's forces.

## NOTES

1. See a fragment from Dio, I, in *The Extract of Virtues and Vices*.
2. *Life of Pyrrhus* (26).
3. Justin, XX (1).
4. The presence of Hannibal made all dissensions among the Romans cease, but Scipio's presence embittered the dissensions already existing among the Carthaginians, and took all the remaining strength from the government. The generals, the senate, the notables became more suspect to the people, and the people became wilder. See, in Appian, the entire war of the first Scipio.
5. Florus, I (16).
6. See Polybius (II, 24). Florus' *Epitome* says that they raised three hundred thousand men in the city and among the Latins.
7. Livy, XXVII (9, 10).
8. See Appian, *The Punic Wars* (25).
9. See what Polybius says of their exactions, especially in the fragment of book IX (11) in *The Extract of Virtues and Vices*.
10. VI (25).
11. Entire corps of Numidians went over to the side of the Romans, who from that point began to breathe again.
12. *Politics*, VII (6 (5)).
13. See what Perrault says about the oars of the ancients, *Essay in Physics*, tit. III, *Mechanics of the Ancients*.
14. The same thing happened at the battle of Salamis. Plutarch, *Life of Themistocles* (14). History is full of similar facts.

15. From which we can judge the imperfection of the navigation of the ancients, since we have abandoned a practice in which we were so superior to them.
16. Louis XIV.
17. Spain and Muscovy.
18. *Roman Antiquities*, VIII.
19. *History of His Life*, Paris, 1742, p. 402.