

CHAPTER ONE

ITALY AND THE
ESTABLISHMENT
OF THE EMPIRE

“*τσοαῦται δὲ ἀφικνοῦνται δεῦρο (Rome) . . . ὀλκάδες ὡς εἰκέναι τὴν πόλιν κοινῶ τιμι τῆς γῆς ἐργαστηρίῳ . . . κατάπλοιοι δὲ καὶ ἀπόπλοιοι οὐ ποτε λείπουσιν.*”
ARISTIDES

So many are the merchant vessels that arrive here that Rome has practically become a common workshop for the whole world. . . . There are always ships putting into or sailing out of the harbour.

“*Ite in orbem universum et de omni eius continentia referte ad Senatum, et ad istam confirmandam huic scripto sigillum meum apposui.*”

Words of figure of Augustus in the Hereford “Mappa Mundi.”

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THE history of Roman trade before the establishment of the Empire can be summed up in a few words. The civilisation of Latium and of Rome during the first five centuries of its existence was predominantly agricultural: industry hardly existed. The Romans who conquered Italy were a race of sturdy peasant farmers and little else. Inhabiting the fertile plain of Latium they had to be continually on the watch to preserve their farms and their crops from the raids of the less fortunate hill tribes, who coveted their good corn-land. Yet it would not be altogether untrue to say that their very conquest of Italy was brought about by their devotion to peaceful commerce: the Roman Empire was not so much the result of a reasoned policy of imperialism carried out by far-seeing statesmen, as the natural outcome of certain qualities implanted deep in the Roman character. Their strong feeling for law and order was coupled with an extraordinary devotion to duty; though slow to rouse they were tenacious of their rights and keen bargainers (a trait which they carried even into their religion). All they desired was to sow and reap on their small farms in peace and undisturbed; it was always to drive back the predatory incursions of some hungry hill tribe that they had recourse to arms, when diplomacy had failed (as the fetial ritual shews). In order to carry on their normal intercourse securely they not only trained themselves as a nation of warriors, but they exercised their legal genius in drawing allies to themselves by covenants, contracts, and treaties. Thus gradually they surrounded themselves with a ring of allies whom it was their duty to protect when attacked by less civilised tribes. Their relations with the Greeks of Campania—which was at that time the commercial

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centre of Italy—brought them up against the Samnites; the extension of their sphere of influence over the South of Italy and their friendship with Massilia threw them into conflict with the Carthaginians, and made them the champions of the cause of Hellenism. And so the slow process went on; to protect their traders and settlers in Spain they had to wage warfare against savage tribes for many years, to aid Massilia they drove back the Allobroges and paved the way for the creation of a province, to help their Greek allies they put down the pirate kingdoms of the Adriatic, and in answer to appeals from the mercantile states of Pergamum and Rhodes they were led first to conquer Philip of Macedon and divide up his kingdom, and later to curtail the ambitions of the Seleucids. Yet it is worthy of careful notice that there are no signs of a mercantile policy; Rome's aim was to protect her own rights and those of her allies rather than to gain new ones; even after the sack of Carthage and the destruction of Corinth she claimed little for herself; Utica was allowed to usurp the trade of her former mistress, and Delos was proclaimed a free port. Greeks and Asiatics and their brethren in Campania drew most profit from her victories. But a change is observable towards the close of the second century before Christ, a change due to the legislation of Gaius Gracchus. This extraordinary genius, whose career marks an epoch in history as great as that of Augustus or Constantine, was quick to grasp the opportunities provided by the annexation of Asia; all his measures, the tax-bills, the colonies which were to be founded at important commercial and maritime centres, the provision of new roads, even the grain dole, shew that he had a clear vision of the future of commerce and that he intended to raise up a commercial party for his own support. From his time the number of Italians resident in Delos steadily increases, Roman knights and financiers become a power to be

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reckoned with, and the formation of the province of Narbonese Gaul is an echo of his policy. Agricultural interests had formerly been predominant at Rome, but now the knights began to claim a voice in the governance of affairs; Cicero needed them for his "Concordia Ordinum," their agents were widespread throughout Greece and Asia Minor, and their indignation with Lucullus' measures resulted in the appointment of Pompey and the opening of new fields for their activity in the annexation of Pontus, Bithynia, and Syria. Narbonese Gaul swarmed with Roman merchants and traders, and many more followed Caesar on his brilliant campaigns; Pliny's dictum that the Roman generals in their warfare always thought of commerce now begins to be true, but only now.

It is not necessary to enumerate at length the resources of the Italian peninsula and its trade possibilities: the subject has been discussed so often, and so large a literature exists concerning it, that we shall only treat of it summarily here, presuming a general acquaintance with it on the part of the reader. The praises of Italy have been sung by many, by none more nobly than by Vergil in the Second Georgic, and Strabo and Pliny follow with their humbler prose panegyrics. Its coast had few harbours, but those large ones; its climate was good and varied; it had abundance of minerals and of timber, for fuel or shipping, and was prolific in food for man and beast.

In the North the Padus valley was a region of rivers and intersecting canals; it was fertile in corn, vines, and millet: it had herds of cattle and flocks of sheep in abundance; it produced much wine and the wool of Mutina was famous. It surpassed all the rest of Italy in its thick population, in the number of its cities, and in its wealth; the proportion of knights in a town like Patavium was extraordinarily high. Over the Apennines lay Etruria, with its abundance of ship-timber, and its clays for pottery: up in the Sabine

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hills vine and olive were cultivated, while of the fertility of the Latian plain there is little need to speak; in the midst stood Rome at the junction of many roads and rivers to receive the crops and the timber of the lands around. But the Southern parts were even more prolific; the plain of Campania, with its warm climate, its crops of wheat and barley, of olive and vine, produced the finest wine and oil in all the world; from here came the Massic and Caecuban brands, the newly-favoured Surrentine, and most famous of all the Falernian; “what wine can compete with the Falernian, what oil with the Venafran?” as Varro proudly asks. On the Adriatic side there was fertile soil around Brundisium and the wool and honey that it exported were alike excellent; the hilly pastures of Calabria supported large flocks of sheep, while the finest wool was obtainable from those of Tarentum. The land of Apulia is described by Strabo as bearing everything in abundance and giving grazing for horses and cattle, while the wool was of a soft and delicate texture.

Sed gravidae fruges et Bacchi Massicus umor
implevere; tenent oleae armentaque laeta.
hinc bellator equus campo sese arduus infert,
hinc albi, Clitumne. greges et maxima taurus
victima,...
hic ver assiduum atque alienis mensibus aestas:
bis gravidae pecudes, bis pomis utilis arbos.

But in addition the country possessed, or had once possessed, abundance of minerals of every kind; Pliny declares that the mines of Italy were second to none, so long as they were worked, and his tone suggests that by his time the exhausted veins of ore could not compete with the larger resources of Spain and Britain. Even during the Republic the Senate had at times forbidden mining altogether; in the North the output of the gold-mines of Vercellae had been thus limited. But copper was still to be found among

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the Bergomates, and iron near Comum, where it was extensively worked, while further South the waters of Sulmo were excellent for tempering iron and steel. The most prolific mineral district, however, was the island of Ilva (Elba), whence iron ore was obtained in large quantities; it could not be smelted there, but was conveyed across to the Italian ports; a certain amount of working was done at the near-by harbour of Populonia, but the most important centre, to which the bulk of the ore was shipped, was the port of Puteoli. Here the manufacturers gathered together a vast host of workmen who were busily employed in the production of weapons and all sorts of iron tools, such as spades, forks, mattocks, and sickles, which were widely exported.

The two most important regions for industry were the valley of the Padus and the plain of Campania. In the former, apart from the wool which was exported from the whole district and extensively spun at Patavium, cheeses and pork were despatched to Rome, and a busy trade went on in wine, which was sent out in huge casks; timber, too, was shipped down the Padus and to the South. At Patavium the wool was made into clothes and hangings, into rugs and carpets and blankets, which were in great demand at the capital and made the fortunes of its wealthy knights. Cups were manufactured at Pollentia, and Arretine ware, originally a product of Etruscan labour, had been transplanted to the North. Another flourishing town was Aquileia, which received the steel and iron of Noricum, and the wines of Istria and Rhaetia, together with the hides of the Northern country, and exported Italian pottery and goods to the barbarian. In the midlands was the thriving pottery centre of Arretium, and the famous marble quarries of Luna and Carrara, which began to be used during the last years of the Republic; these together with the stone of Tibur and Gabii were to afford Augustus material for

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his rebuilding and beautification of old Rome. In the South, besides the ironworks and factories of Puteoli, a considerable industry appears to have existed in and around Capua for the manufacture of articles of bronze and of copper, which were used all over Italy; silver ware too was probably produced on a large scale, and the red-glazed Arretine ware was made at Puteoli, while there were glass-factories newly founded on the Volturnus. Puteoli itself was the largest and busiest port of Italy and contained a cosmopolitan population; Lucilius called it "a smaller Delos," which was the great international mart of those days. Yet even so we must remember that all this activity and industry was of comparatively recent date, that it was only after Gracchan days that Italian merchants begin to play an important part in Aegean and Mediterranean trade, and that the greater part even of these Italians came of Campanian and Southern stock, few being of Latin blood. Again, even in the most flourishing days of the Republic, Puteoli, in spite of its manifold occupations, was never able to send out to the East a cargo equal to that she received; the Alexandrine and Asiatic ships always drew out of her harbour considerably lighter than they had put in.

Such then, summarily, were the resources of Italy and such the state of her industries in the time of Caesar and Pompey. Within the last few decades new prospects seemed to have dawned for Roman industry and finance; Pompey had opened up new provinces such as Bithynia and Syria, Caesar had annexed the vast territory of Gaul; pottery was being manufactured on an extensive scale, and the discovery of glass-blowing had brought an immense increase to the trade besides greatly cheapening the cost of glass ware. Though her agriculture might be declining, and though vast areas of land were left for sheep and cattle to wander over, the cultivation of the olive was being

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encouraged, and about the year 52 B.C. the first cargo of oil had been exported from Italy. But then there broke out the terrible and desolating storm of civil war, which raged almost without interruption for close on twenty years; the provinces were the scene of bloody fighting, and Italy was drained of her best stock; farms lay neglected in the absence of their masters, there were sudden requisitions, burning of towns and villages, and all those wanton acts which war lets loose; piracy began to lift its head again upon the sea, and brigands overran the land; then came a flood of confiscations and evictions to satisfy the greed of the triumvirs and to provide the wherewithal to reward their soldiery; no man's goods could be thought safe, no man's land was secure, property sank to a ridiculous value, the rate of interest soared high, credit was impaired: the promise of a few years before seemed hideously blighted.

But there was a deliverer at hand. The young Octavian, who had been a member of the Triumvirate formed after the death of Caesar, who had sanctioned the confiscations and proscriptions and murders of the time with a cruelty that appears more appalling than that of Antony or Lepidus, was reserved by destiny for nobler things. He began to realise the work that was appointed him, the task of rescuing Italy and the provinces from the ravages of the war and bringing them back to a normal basis once more. The labour was appalling. We in our generation—though we have tasted all the bitterness of war and of its aftermath—feel that the titles bestowed upon him, and the praises lavished by poets and orators are too extravagant; we are apt to ascribe them to “courtly adulation” or to “poetical exaggeration.” But men were in sober solemn earnest, for they knew what had to be done, and what Augustus had done. The wounds of civil war had to be healed, a jealous body of the old *noblesse* had to be conciliated, the Senate had to be assured of power and respect, payment had to

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be found for the veterans, the frontiers defended, piracy overcome and brigandage put down, the hungry populace of Rome fed, the provincials won over by good and settled government, trade and commerce and industry restored to their prosperity, and credit brought back; above all, the whole population of the Empire had to be given that feeling of security and freedom from fear without which men will never embark on any undertaking of commerce. All this Augustus did and so brought about the renascence of intercourse and of trade. That is the reason why sailors of Alexandria once approached him near Puteoli and clad in festal garments offered incense to him as a god; it was thanks to him, they said, that they could live and make their voyages, thanks to him that they could enjoy their freedom and their fortunes. So, too, Philo, who may be reasonably supposed to mirror the feeling of Alexandria, has no words of praise too high for Augustus: he had found the world in confusion and turmoil, the human race almost spent by mutual slaughter and by war; it was he who had loosed the world from its chains and put down every form of strife; he had emptied the sea of pirates and covered it with the fleets of merchants; he had brought cities back into freedom, turned disorder into order, tamed savage races; he was the guardian of peace and dispenser of all good things. It is not surprising that in Alexandria there was raised to him a splendid gleaming temple, facing the great harbours, that was filled with offerings and dedications and votive gifts in gold and silver; nor that at Philae the grateful people should set up a temple to him as "Saviour and Benefactor." The provinces fully appreciated the blessings of his rule, as did Italy. We have multitudinous references to him in contemporary poets, and upon his return from Gaul in 13 B.C. an altar was dedicated to "Fortuna Redux." Horace, on the occasion of this same return, sums up the matter in an ode every phrase of which

should be given its full weight; most significant are the lines:

Sic desideriiis icta fidelibus
 Quaerit patria Caesarem.
 Tutus bos etenim rura perambulat,
 Nutrit rura Ceres almaque Faustitas,
 Pacatum volitant per mare navitae,
 Culpari metuit *Fides*....
 Condit quisque diem collibus in suis,
 Et vitem viduas ducit ad arbores;
 Hinc ad vina redit laetus et alteris
 Te mensis adhibet deum.

Such measures came naturally to Augustus. He was sprung from an Italian middle-class family, and had not the aristocratic contempt for trade which was inborn in the consulars; he could appreciate the point of view of the merchant and middle-class business man; one of his main achievements was to revive the ancient glories of the equites and fit them for holding governmental appointments, while wealthy merchants of the freedman class were made to feel that they too had a stake in the Empire by the creation of the order of "Seviri Augustales." His family and his friends, among the enormous property they possessed, owned various mines—such as those of Livia in Gaul, or of Sallust among the Centrones—or fertile pieces of territory (such as the rich region of Jamneia, bequeathed to the imperial family), and so could understand the need for security throughout the provinces and for quick communication of news. Above all, his control of Egypt, and the necessity of regular and assured corn-supply therefrom in order to feed the populace of Rome, made him take such measures as the cleaning out and repair of the neglected Nile irrigation channels and the constitution of the Alexandrine corn-fleet.

The essentials of a flourishing trade are, firstly, a peaceable population living unhindered by fear of invasion or