

The Story of Rome

The story of Rome began in about 753 B.C. when some wandering people from Northern Europe reached a hill near the River Tiber in Italy. They built a village and settled down to grow crops and keep cattle and sheep. Soon the village grew and huts were built on the other hills. Later the villages joined up into a city and a trading centre, ruled by kings. ①



The people got rid of their king, in 509 B.C., and set up a republic, choosing two consuls each year to rule instead. The Romans fought and conquered their neighbours to protect their land. Gradually they captured more and more territory until by 250 B.C., they controlled the whole of Italy. ②



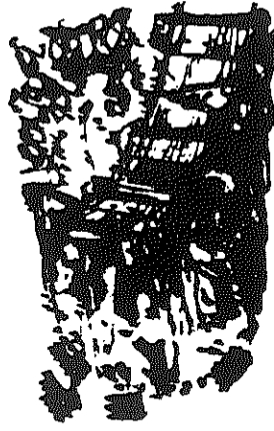
The Roman armies were strong and brave but, when war broke out with the people of Carthage, in 260 B.C., they had to learn to fight at sea. They built a huge fleet of fighting ships and soon won great battles against these fierce sea-going people, whose main city was in North Africa. The Carthaginians built a new base in Spain so they could attack the Romans. ③



In Spain, a young army commander, called Hannibal, built up a huge army. Many of Rome's enemies joined him and they marched, with 36 elephants, over the Alps into Northern Italy. He won many battles but the Romans cut off Hannibal's supply lines and stopped him reaching Rome. ④



The Romans landed in North Africa, in 204 B.C., to attack the city of Carthage. Hannibal sailed home to defend it but Carthage was defeated. Later, the Romans besieged the city and, in 146 B.C., completely destroyed it. The people were killed or sold as slaves. ⑤



The defeat of Carthage made Rome the greatest power in the Mediterranean. At home, the rich people lived in great luxury with slaves to work in their houses and on their farms. But they were greedy and paid people to elect them as state officials. In the provinces, some governors made their subjects pay huge taxes and robbed them. ⑥



Civil war broke out in Rome when two generals tried to grab power. One marched his troops through the streets, killing everyone he did not like. Then in 73 B.C. Spartacus, a slave, led a revolt. He escaped to Mount Vesuvius and was joined by 90,000 slaves. He fought off the Roman army until he was killed in 71 B.C. ⑦



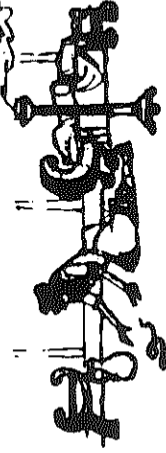
Two generals, Julius Caesar and Pompey, struggled for control of the government. Caesar marched from Gaul to Rome but Pompey left for Greece. Caesar defeated Pompey's army there but Pompey escaped to Egypt where he was murdered. Caesar went to Egypt and made Cleopatra queen. After more conquests he returned to Rome. ⑧



In 45 B.C. Caesar became sole ruler of Rome. He used his power to bring justice to the people and planned to improve the city. But he had many enemies who feared he would become king. In 44 B.C. he was stabbed to death in the Senate. ⑨



Caesar's nephew and heir, Octavian, defeated the last of Caesar's enemies when he won a great sea battle against Antony, Antony, and later his friend, Cleopatra killed themselves. Octavian then became head of the state and its first emperor. (10)

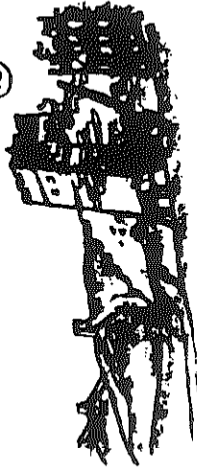


Octavian took the name of Augustus. He built up the armies to guard the Roman frontiers against invaders. He tried to conquer land north of the River Rhine but lost a terrible battle against German tribes. In the empire, people settled down to build new cities. The government built roads to bring peace and trade. (11)



When Augustus died in A.D. 14, members of his family succeeded him. But the emperor was not a king and anyone who had enough support could come to power. In one year, there were four emperors, each put forward by different groups of soldiers. Later in the first century A.D., men who had not even been born in Rome became emperors. (12)

In A.D. 117, Hadrian was made emperor because he was a good general. He strengthened the frontiers and built a great stone wall across the north of Britain to keep out the barbarians. In Judaea, the Roman army put down a revolt by the Jews and thousands were killed. (13)



Early in the second century A.D. the empire reached its greatest extent. But the barbarians were attacking the frontiers. Southern German tribes were pushed forward by the tribes behind them and they swept into northern Italy. They were defeated but still threatened Rome's northern and eastern borders of the empire. (14)



In the third century A.D., Rome's armies became a strong influence on the affairs of government. Many emperors were created by the troops and ruled for very short periods. The vast empire was very hard to control and there were many civil wars. Old enemies, such as the Persians, took the chance to regain land they had lost and even kidnapped and killed the emperor Valerian. (15)



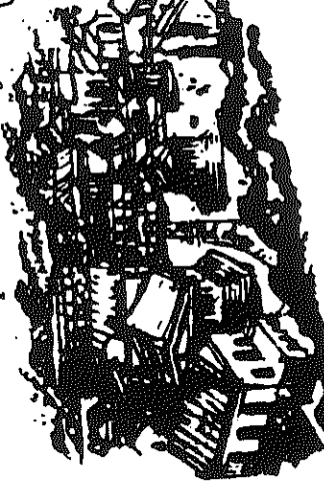
People who lived in the empire became afraid of the barbarians and no longer believed Roman might could protect them. Soldiers posted across the empire spread new religions from the East and many people became Christians. When the emperors wanted to blame someone for the troubles in the empire, they blamed Christians and many were put to death. (16)



For a few years, the empire was saved by the emperor Diocletian. But there was not enough money to pay the armies needed to fight off the invaders.



The next ruler, Constantine, won a battle to become emperor with the Christian sign on his standard. He made Christianity the state religion in A.D. 320 and set up a new capital in the east, called Constantinople, after him. The empire was ruled from there. It held back outside enemies until 1453 when it was overrun by the Turks. But the barbarians invaded the western half of the Roman empire and, in A.D. 410 they sacked Rome. A barbarian made himself ruler of Italy in 476 and the empire was destroyed. (17)



After the barbarians overran the empire, many Roman things remained. The barbarians became Christians, and Latin—the Roman language—became the language of the Church. The languages now spoken in France, Spain, Italy and Portugal all developed from Latin and there are many Latin words in Dutch, German and English. Roman ideas of law and justice have been adopted by Western law and many cities have copied the Roman style. (18)