

for life, and executives were bound to submit to it all important measures. In theory it was a purely advisory body, but since its members were ex-magistrates, representing the highest ability and influence of the state, any advice it gave was almost certain to be accepted, for no magistrate would dare to challenge such a body unless he was prepared to back up his act by force of arms.

The Plebs Gain Further Power

The growing power of the plebs was marked by the gradual rise of a new voting body, the *comitia tributa*, in which one man's vote counted for as much as another's. This developed from the plebeian assembly (*concilium plebis*, which still continued to meet) by allowing patricians also to participate. After the passage of a law (*lex Hortensia*) in 287 B.C. making the acts of the plebeian assembly binding on all the people, these two bodies made most of the laws.

Side by side with the struggle for political power went on the economic struggle between rich and poor. The wealthy landowners continued to increase their estates, appropriating the best of the lands and increasing their herds until they monopolized the public pasture. They continued the practice of lending money at ruinous interest to the small proprietors, reducing them to slavery when they could not pay. Moreover, the population of Rome was increasing too fast, and the soil was becoming poorer because of the primitive farming methods.

The burden of constant warfare fell most heavily on the plebeians, who had to leave their little farms to fight the state's battles. Gradually, however, reforms were forced through, chief of which were the Licinian laws of 367, which again revised the debt laws, limited holdings to 300 acres, and compelled the large landowners to employ a certain proportion of free labourers.

The Romans Capture Veii

The most formidable of Rome's early foes had been the Etruscans. With their greater numbers and superior civilization, the Etruscans would probably have reduced Rome to vassalage but for the destruction of their fleet in a war with the Greek city of Syracuse in Italy (474 B.C.), and the constant pressure of the Gauls from the north, who swarmed into the Po valley toward the end of the 5th century and laid waste the Etruscan cities of the north. Thus aided, the Romans had finally been able (396 B.C.) to take, after a ten years' siege, the powerful Etruscan stronghold of Veii, eight miles from Rome.

In its conflicts with this foe and with neighbouring Italic tribes (chiefly the Æquians and Volscians) Rome was supported by the other Latin cities to the south, which were united

under the name of the Latin League and had made a treaty with Rome for mutual defence. The victorious progress of Rome received a temporary set-back in 390, when wandering Gauls advanced through the heart of Etruria, laying waste the land as they went, and capturing and sacking Rome. Legend tells how the garrison on the Capitol Hill was aroused in the nick of time by the cackling of the sacred geese, and repulsed the storming party.

After a fruitless siege the Gauls accepted a heavy ransom and returned to the valley of the Po. Though Rome had been burned, the Etruscans had suffered far more in the invasion, and were so weakened that Rome was able to seize their southern possessions and in another century to conquer their whole territory.

Meanwhile the Latin League had become restive under the growing power and arrogance of their ally and attempted to break away from its control. From the two years' war which followed (340-338), Rome emerged victorious, reducing some of the towns to vassalage, giving others full Roman citizenship, and others partial citizenship (the "Latin right").

The Samnites Finally Crushed

Another formidable foe in central Italy still remained to be reckoned with, the Samnites, who were also of Italic stock. The first conflict with this warlike people (343-341) had been interrupted by the Latin revolt. The truce then made was broken a few years later (326), and a desperate struggle continued, with interruptions, until the decisive battle of Sentinum (295) made Rome supreme over all central and northern Italy.

Only southern Italy, occupied by a disunited group of Greek city-states, remained independent. Its fate was not long delayed. Alarmed at the spread of Roman power, the Greek cities appealed to Pyrrhus, King of Epirus in Greece. He inflicted two telling defeats on the Roman army, and then crossed to Sicily to aid the Greek cities there to throw off the yoke of Carthage. Encouraged by the arrival of a Carthaginian fleet, Rome renewed the struggle, and in 275 repulsed Pyrrhus in the battle of Beneventum. One by one the Greek cities of the south were taken, and Rome was mistress of all Italy.

Welding their Conquests Together

Nowhere did Roman genius shine with greater brilliancy than in the system which was gradually devised to weld these immense conquests into a contented and unified whole. To many of the conquered cities of Italy were granted the privileges of Roman citizenship, in full or in part, as had been done with the Latin cities. Most of them were given the status of "allies," with self-government and the right to trade