

THE ROMANS DEFY THE CONQUERING PYRRHUS



At the left is the ambassador sent by Pyrrhus to offer peace to the Senators, because he foresaw that it would be difficult to subdue the Romans, even though they had suffered heavy losses in the recent battle of Heraclea (280 B.C.). At first the Romans were inclined to welcome peace, but the aged Appius Claudius Cæcus, the builder of the Appian Way, though so weak that he had to be carried into the Senate chamber, denounced the peace and urged his fellow Senators to reply that Rome never negotiated with an enemy on Roman soil.

and intermarry in Rome, but not to vote. Furthermore, all Italy was dotted with colonies of Roman citizens, most of whom retained their full civic rights. Considerable territory, nearly one-sixth of all Italy, was annexed and distributed among Roman citizens.

Two centuries of warfare had now made Rome a nation of soldiers. Her only remaining rival in the western Mediterranean was the Phœnician colony of Carthage, which was the chief naval power, as Rome was the chief land power. Carthaginian warships made the western Mediterranean a closed sea, and sunk the trading vessel of any other city which dared to bid for a share of the rich commerce of this region.

Carthage a Vassal State

Such a condition was intolerable to the pride of Rome, and in 264 B.C. began a conflict for Mediterranean supremacy (the Punic wars), which continued with interruptions until Carthage was finally destroyed in 146, and in which the courage and endurance of Rome were tested to the utmost. But the stern devotion to duty, which was the keynote of Roman character, prevailed in the end, and after the battle of Zama (202 B.C.) Carthage was reduced to the status of a vassal state. Fifty years later, with savage vindictiveness, Rome again attacked

her prostrate rival and razed the city (third Punic War). (See Carthage ; Hannibal.)

Rome was now well launched on her way to world dominion. Upper Italy (*Gallia Cisalpina*), Sicily, Spain, Macedonia, Greece, and Asia Minor were subdued and made Roman provinces. Intoxicated with their sudden rise to imperial power, the new generation of statesmen gave themselves over to ruthless aggression and spoliation.

Most of the conquered lands were administered by governors (*proconsuls*), who ruled like Oriental despots with the sole aim of amassing in their one year of office wealth for a lifetime. Such enormous taxes were wrung from the subject peoples that they not only defrayed most of the expenses of the Roman state but enriched the greedy tax-farmers (*publicani*), who purchased the privilege of collecting the taxes.

Evil Effects of Wealth

Wealth poured into Rome from the four corners of the globe, and the ancient simplicity of Roman life gave way to Asiatic luxury and pomp. The suddenly enriched office-holders acquired estates, buying up the little farms of the poor peasants, who could not compete with the hordes of slaves that worked the great plantations. The streets of the capital were