

of human history, if the welfare of the great mass of the population be considered. (See Marcus Aurelius Antoninus.)

After Marcus Aurelius the decline of the empire set in. The legions had found that they could make emperors at will from among their own numbers, and they set up 80 such rulers in 90 years. The flood was at length stemmed by Diocletian (284-305), but at the price of turning the Roman state into an Oriental despotism. The Senate was now no more than the city council of Rome.

Capital Moved to Byzantium

Diocletian also took the first step that ultimately led to the division of the empire, entrusting an associate with the government of the West, while he himself ruled the East. The decline in the importance of Rome that began with Diocletian was completed when Constantine moved his capital to the Greek city of Byzantium on the Black Sea (A.D. 330), renaming it in his own honour Constantinople. (See Constantinople.)

The transfer of the capital meant ultimately a division of the empire. The story of the Byzantine Empire is a long and glorious one, that of the Western Empire from this time on merely one of weakness and decline (see Byzan-

tine Empire). Gradually the northern barbarians crept into Italy, and in 410 Alaric took Rome. The Western Empire from that time became the prey of successive waves of barbarians. (See Alaric ; Goths, Huns, Vandals.)

Romulus Augustulus Deposed

In 476 Romulus Augustulus, the last of the imperial line in the West, who combined in his name that of Rome's legendary founder and that of her first emperor, was deposed by the barbarian leader Odoacer. The Roman Empire was at an end, and the barbarian kingdoms of the Middle Ages were soon to take its place.

But in reading the history of France, Italy, and Spain, you will realize that the end of the Roman Empire was in a way only its beginning. These new kingdoms governed themselves largely by Roman law, spoke forms of Latin, and professed the Christian religion.

Thus, even though the great empire decayed and fell, Rome had won a new spiritual dominion, for the new faith spread throughout the lands which the Roman power had brought together but could no longer hold, and the seat of the great pagan power became the head of the Christian Church, the spiritual capital of Christendom. (See also Greek and Roman Art ; Italy ; Latin Language and Literature.)

A ROMAN FAMILY DINNER IN THE PERIOD OF DECADENCE



After Rome's conquest of the East, the sturdy simplicity that marked the Roman life of earlier times gave way to Oriental luxury and splendour. The women decked themselves in diamonds, pearls, and rubies from India, and robed themselves in silks from China. Peaches, apricots, and other rare delicacies, then appearing for the first time in the Roman world, were brought at immense expense to furnish their tables. And, worst of all, her citizens became degenerate, like the corpulent gourmand at the head of this table.

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