



History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire: Volume I (Volume 1)

Edward Gibbon

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EDWARD GIBBON (1737-1794), born in Putney, Surrey. He was a sickly child and his education at Westminster and Magdalen College, Oxford, was irregular. At the age of 16 he became Catholic. Within weeks of his conversion, the adolescent was removed from Oxford and sent to live under the care and tutelage of Daniel Pavillard, reformed pastor of Lausanne, Switzerland. There he also met the daughter of the pastor of Crassy, a young woman named Suzanne Curchod, who would later become the wife of Louis XVI's finance minister Jacques Necker, and the mother of Mme de Staël, but his father persuaded him to break off the engagement. In 1754 he reconverted to Protestantism. From 1759 he served as a captain in the Hampshire Militia until he left again for the Continent in 1763. He published in 1761 his "Essai sur l'étude de la littérature », of which an English version appeared in 1764. In 1774 Gibbon entered Parliament and was made a commissioner of trade and plantations. It was in Italy that he formed the plan of his «History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire » (1788). According to Gibbon, the Roman Empire succumbed to barbarian invasions in large part due to the gradual loss of civic virtue among its citizens. Christianity had also his own responsibility because it created a belief that a better life existed after death, which fostered an indifference to the present among Roman citizens, thus sapping their desire to sacrifice for a larger purpose.

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