Sometimes the cowardice of the emperors, often the weakness of the empire, brought about attempts to appease with money the peoples threatening invasion. But peace cannot be bought, because the seller is then in a better position to compel it to be bought again.

It is preferable to run the risk of waging an unsuccessful war than to give money to assure peace. For a prince is always respected if it is known that it would take a long struggle to conquer him.

Besides, such gifts changed into tributes, and, freely given at the beginning, later became compulsory. They were considered acquired rights, and when an emperor refused them to some peoples, or wanted to give less, they became his mortal enemies. Among a thousand examples, the army Julian led against the Persians was pursued in its retreat by Arabs to whom he had refused the customary tribute. And immediately afterward, under Valentinian's empire, the Alemanni, to whom smaller presents than usual had been offered, became indignant; and these peoples of the north, already swayed by the point of honor, avenged this pretended insult by a cruel war.

All these nations surrounding the empire in Europe
and Asia absorbed the riches of the Romans little by little. And as the Romans had grown great because the gold and silver of all kings had been carried to them,² they grew weak because their gold and silver were carried to others.

The mistakes of statesmen are not always voluntary. Often they are the necessary consequences of the situation in which they find themselves, with difficulties giving rise to still more difficulties.

The military, as we have seen, had become very burdensome to the state. Soldiers received three kinds of benefits: their ordinary pay, some compensation once their service was over, and occasional gifts which quite often became rights for men who held the people and the prince in their hands.

The lack of funds to pay these expenses made it necessary to find a cheaper army. Treaties were made with barbarian nations, who had neither the luxury of the Roman soldiers, nor the same spirit, nor the same pretensions.

There was another advantage in this. Since barbarians fell on a country swiftly, needing no preparation once they resolved to move, it was difficult to levy troops in the provinces in time. The Romans therefore used for their defense another body of barbarians, always ready to receive money, to pillage, and to fight. They were served for the moment, but later there was as much trouble reducing their auxiliaries as their enemies.

The early Romans ⁵ did not put a greater number of auxiliary troops than Roman troops in their armies. And although their allies were really subjects, they did not want to have for subjects peoples who were more warlike than themselves.

In this later period, however, not only did they fail to observe this proportion of auxiliary troops, but they even filled the corps of national troops with barbarian soldiers.

Thus, they established practices wholly contrary to those that had made them universal masters. And, as formerly their constant policy was to keep the military art for themselves and deprive all their neighbors of it, they were now destroying it among themselves and establishing it among others.

Here, in a word, is the history of the Romans. By means of their maxims they conquered all peoples, but when they had succeeded in doing so, their republic could not endure. It was necessary to change the government, and contrary maxims employed by the new government made their greatness collapse.

It is not chance that rules the world. Ask the Romans, who had a continuous sequence of successes when they were guided by a certain plan, and an uninterrupted sequence of reverses when they followed another. There are general causes, moral and physical, which act in every monarchy, elevating it, maintaining it, or hurling it to the ground. All accidents are controlled by these causes. And if the chance of one battle—that is, a particular cause—has brought a state to ruin, some general cause made it necessary for that state to perish from a single battle. In a word, the main trend draws with it all particular accidents.

We see that the land forces of Denmark, for nearly two centuries, have almost always been beaten by those of Sweden. Apart from the courage of the two nations and the chances of war, there must be an inner vice * in the military or civil government of Denmark which has produced this effect—and I do not believe it is hard to discover.

Finally, the Romans lost their military discipline and went so far as to abandon their own arms. Vegetius says that when the soldiers found them too heavy, they obtained

* True, in his edition, suggests that Montesquieu may have been thinking of the defects of the Danish oligarchy and the weakened condition in which it kept the royal power prior to 1660. Jullian points to the internal struggle of the different orders as the main vice of the Danish government.
permission from the emperor Gratian to leave off the cuirass and then the helmet. And thus defencelessly exposed to the blows of the enemy, they no longer thought of anything but flight.

He adds that they had lost the habit of fortifying their camp, and that, through this neglect, their armies were captured by the barbarian cavalry.

The cavalry of the early Romans was quite small. It comprised only an eleventh of each legion, very often less, and in view of the fact that we today have so many sieges to make, in which cavalry has little use, it is extraordinary that their cavalry was much smaller than ours. When the Romans were in decline, they had almost nothing but cavalry. It seems to me that the more expert a nation becomes in the military art, the more it makes use of infantry, and that the less it knows of that art, the more it enlarges its cavalry. The reason is that heavy or light infantry without discipline is worthless, whereas cavalry can always keep going, in its very disorder. Cavalry's action consists more in its impetuosity and a certain shock, infantry's in its resistance and a certain immobility—it is rather a reaction than an action. In short, the force of cavalry is momentary, whereas infantry acts for a longer time; but this requires discipline.

The Romans succeeded in commanding all peoples not only by means of the art of war but also by their prudence, wisdom and constancy, and their love of glory and country. When all these virtues vanished under the emperors, the military art remained, and by it they kept what they had acquired in spite of the weakness and tyranny of their princes. But when corruption entered the military itself, the Romans became the prey of all peoples.

An empire founded by arms needs to be sustained by arms. But just as, when a state is in trouble, people cannot imagine how it can extricate itself, so, when a state is at peace and its power is respected, it does not occur to anyone how such a situation can change. Such a state therefore neglects its army, from which it believes it has nothing to hope for and everything to fear, and frequently even seeks to weaken it.

It was an inviolable rule of the early Romans that whoever had abandoned his post or lost his arms in battle was punished with death. Julian and Valentinian reestablished the old penalties in this respect. But the barbarians taken into Roman pay were accustomed to making war like the Tartars today—fleeing to fight again, seeking pillage rather than honor—and were incapable of this kind of discipline.

Such was the discipline of the early Romans that generals had been known to condemn their sons to death for winning a victory without orders. But when they were mixed in with the barbarians, they contracted the spirit of independence which marked the character of these nations. And if you read of Belisarius' wars against the Goths, you will see a general whom his officers almost always disobeyed.

While the civil wars were raging, Sulla and Sertorius still preferred to perish rather than do anything from which Mithridates could profit. But in later times, as soon as a minister or some great man believed his avarice, vengeance or ambition would be served by letting the barbarians enter the empire, he immediately gave it over to their ravages.

No states are in greater need of taxes than those which are growing weaker, so that burdens must be increased in proportion as the ability to pay decreases. Soon, in the Roman provinces, taxes became unbearable.

It is necessary to read, in Salvian, of the horrible exactions imposed on the population. Pursued by tax farmers, the citizens could do nothing but seek refuge among the barbarians or surrender their liberty to the first person who wanted to take it.

This will explain, in our French history, the patience shown by the Gauls in enduring the revolution which was to estab-
lish so overwhelming a difference between a nation of nobles and a nation of commoners. In making so many citizens serfs—that is, slaves of the field to which they were attached—the barbarians scarcely introduced anything which had not been more cruelly practiced before them.

NOTES

1. At first everything was given to the soldiers, later to the enemy.
2. Ammianus Marcellinus, XXV (6).
3. Ibid., XXVI (5).
4. "You want riches?" said an emperor to his grumbling army. "There lies the country of the Persians; let us seek riches there. Believe me, nothing remains of the many treasures the Roman republic once possessed; and the evil stems from those who taught princes to buy the peace of the barbarians. Our finances are exhausted, our cities destroyed, our provinces ruined. An emperor who knows no other goods than those of the soul is not ashamed to confess an honest poverty." Ibid., XXIV (3).
5. This is an observation made by Vegetius (III, 1); and it appears from Livy (XXI, 55) that if the number of auxiliaries sometimes exceeded, it was by very little.
7. Without observing any of our military maxims, the Tartar cavalry has done great things in all ages. See the Narrations, and especially those of the last conquest of China.
8. They had no desire to subject themselves to the labors of Roman soldiers. See Ammianus Marcellinus, XVIII (2), who mentions as an extraordinary thing that they did so on occasion to please Julian, who wanted to put certain strongholds in a state of readiness.
9. This was not surprising in view of the intermixture that had taken place with nations which had been wandering, which knew no fatherland, and from which whole bodies of troops often joined the victorious foe against their own nation. See, in Procopius (The Gothic War, I, 15) what the Goths were like under Vittigis.
10. See all of the fifth book of The Government of God; see also, in the Embassy written by Priscus, the talk of a Roman settled among the Huns about his happiness in that country.
11. Again see Salvian, V, and the laws of the Code (Justinian, XI, 47) and Digest (XXXIII, 7) on this point.