

STREAMS OF HISTORY
ANCIENT ROME

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ANCIENT ROME**

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THE GEOGRAPHY OF ITALY

IF you will take a glance at the map of Europe, you will see that not very far west of Greece, extending seven hundred miles down into the Mediterranean Sea, is a slender peninsula which looks very much like a great boot. It seems to have its back turned toward the back of Greece and is drawn up to kick, as if it were a ball, the little island which you see near it. This peninsula is Italy, and the island is Sicily, but it is mostly of the peninsula that we wish first to learn.

Italy extends far out into the sea, and seems to be almost in the center of it. Westward, at no very great distance, lies the peninsula of Spain. Eastward, and scarcely farther away than Spain, are Egypt and the lands of the Phœnicians and of the Jews. Greece is so near, that standing on the eastern shore of Italy on a bright, clear day, one can see the dim outlines of its western coast; and Africa is only a few hours sail to the south. Any one of these countries can be reached easily and quickly from Italy. In fact, Italy is the central country of the Mediterranean Sea.

Italy differs greatly from Greece in shape. Greece is made up of a large peninsula, which in turn consists of many smaller ones. On a map it looks

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somewhat like a maple leaf, being cut up into many narrow, sharp points, or like a palm to which are attached the stubby fingers.

Italy is not so. It is of an average width of about one hundred miles at all places except in the north, and has only a few sharp projections. Since the whole peninsula is shaped like a boot, one of the projections may be called the toe; another looks like a rather high heel; the third one, on its back, if it were only lower down, would look very much like a spur on the heel.

You may think of Italy in general as being about once the width, twice the length, and twice the extent of Florida. As I have already told you, scarcely any part of it is more than a hundred miles wide, and it is only six or seven times as long as wide. At its northern end, where it spreads out into the high top of the boot, and is really no longer a peninsula, it becomes about three times as wide as before. Its northern boundary is formed by the high and rugged Alps, which extend in a kind of half-circle from the Mediterranean to the Adriatic Sea, thus, like a mighty wall, shutting Italy off to a great extent from the rest of the continent. Through these mountains there are very few passes, and even these are very rugged and difficult to cross, for they are filled with deep snows and large glaciers. Italy thus formed in ancient times a kind of out-of-the-way place, in which her greatest city, Rome, developed without much interference from the barbarians of the North.

Most of this wider part of Italy just south of the Alps (now called the Plain of Lombardy) forms a level expanse about as large as Indiana. It is the richest part

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of all Italy. The melting snows of the Alps start many streams, which flow down the mountain sides and unite to form the River Po, which flows eastward through the plains and empties into the Adriatic Sea. The little streams that come tumbling down the mountain side are very swift and carry down a large amount of rich soil. This soil, being washed down into the plain below and spread out over the valley, makes the Po valley very productive.

If we should go there today, we should find great fields of waving grain and large groves of mulberry trees. On the Adriatic, north of the mouth of the Po, the interesting city of Venice now stands on more than a hundred little islands, and the gondolas sail on its streets of water, arched over by hundreds of bridges. But long ago, when Rome was beginning to rise, there was no Venice, and on the plain there were but few fields of grain and groves of mulberry trees. Here, where now all is so beautiful, were then only large, unhealthy marshes and many low sandy islands,—the homes of a few scattered fishermen. Through these islands and swamps the dirty waters of the Po found their way slowly to the sea in many shallow mouths. Thus, because of the swamps and the absence of good harbors, northern Italy did not have great cities grow up in it in early times.

On the south side of the northern plain, beginning where the Alps meet the Mediterranean, starts another great chain of mountains. At first they so closely follow the shore that a road can barely creep between the foothills and the sea. These mountains run at first eastward till they almost cross the penin-

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sula, and then, bending southward, continue throughout the length of Italy, making a backbone for the country. Down into the toe of the boot they extend, and, at last, reaching the sea, jump over the strait into the island of Sicily. These are the Apennines. They do not have the many pointed peaks, nor are they so high, as the rugged and snowy Alps. Their sides, even to the very top, are covered with fine forests of oak, elm, pine and chestnut, thus giving plenty of timber for building ships. Rome found these forests of great value when she came to build a navy with which to fight the Carthaginians on the sea.

You must thus imagine Italy as having had a belt through its center from north to south, bristling with mountain chains and peaks, through which, however, were many easy passes, and on both sides of which were hilly plains, sloping down to the sea. Between the chains, among the peaks, and along the mountain sides, lay many valleys in which herds of long horned cattle and large flocks of sheep, herded by men who loved a rough mountain life, found excellent pastures.

The eastern slope of Italy is short and steep, and so rugged that it is only fitted for people who can live on the products of a shepherd's life. There are few harbors on the coast, and there is little to invite people who are seeking homes. For this reason, as I have already said, it was the back of Italy which was turned toward Greece and the east. On the west side of the mountains the slope is gentler, and contains several quite large fertile plains where grains may be raised; and in the south, near the toe, the climate is so mild that tropical fruits, such as the olive, the orange and

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the fig, are found in great abundance. Grape vines grow in great numbers, and climbing to the very tops of the trees, produce large quantities of fruit. The western coast contains several good harbors. Thus the face of Italy may be said to be turned toward Spain and the west.

Since the peninsula is so narrow and the distance from the Apennines to the sea is not great, you must not expect to find long, deep rivers, none even so large as the Po. Indeed they are very much like those of Greece,—short, rapid, and overflowing during the rains or at the time when the hot sun melts the snow on the mountain tops, and only small and dried up at other times. There is but one river on which even a boat of considerable size can sail. This is the Tiber, which rises in the Apennines where they bend south into the peninsula, and then flows south about one hundred eighty-five miles, emptying through a small plain into the Mediterranean about halfway down the peninsula. It will carry boats over about fifty miles of its lower course.

The plain through which it flows is the largest one on this slope and is called Latium. It was on the banks of the Tiber and in this plain that the most interesting life of Italy developed; for here, on a low group of hills, fifteen miles from the mouth of the Tiber, grew up Rome,—the mighty center of the ancient world. Although Rome began with rude huts for homes and with a mud wall, the people learned to make use of the things around them until this city grew to be wealthy, and finally master of all Italy, and then of every country touching the Mediterranean.

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Out over a plain not larger than an average western county, Rome slowly spread, during a period of three hundred years, learning all the time how to govern the various peoples who lived in the lowlands. Having learned this lesson of how to govern herself, she spent the next two hundred years in conquering the highlanders—the rude people who lived up in the mountain valleys—and teaching them the lessons of law and order.

Near the seashore, throughout the plain of Latium, were many marshes much like those near the mouth of the Po. These in the hot Italian sun became full of malaria, and the people who braved the danger of fever had to build great drains before the country became healthy. The waters of “Yellow Tiber,” filled with mud swept down from the mountain side, could not be used for drinking and bathing, so the people constructed waterways—aqueducts, they called them—from the pure mountain springs miles away, to bring water to the city. This taught them how to build arches in tunneling the mountains and bridging the rivers and valleys.

The mountains were filled with white limestone, which, if placed in the air, became hard and took on beautiful tints. This they used for building their temples and other fine buildings, for near Rome there was no marble as there was near Athens. From the old volcanoes, too, they obtained great quantities of lava, which they used in building roads so well that some of them remain at the present day.

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But all this required hundreds of years of work, and the people who patiently did these things, in thus learning to rule nature, learned at the same time to rule men. Rome's last great work in history was to overcome all the peoples around the Mediterranean Sea, and to teach them her great lessons of law and order. This she had no great trouble in doing, for being in the very center of the Mediterranean, and having wonderful power for governing people, she had but to reach her mighty arms to the east and the west and bind them all together at the one common center—Rome—through the great lessons of industry and law which she taught so well to those whom she overcame, that they were never forgotten.

ROME IN HER INFANCY

WHILE we were watching Greece win her freedom on the fields of Marathon and Plataea, and while we followed Alexander into the far East, where he carried Grecian arms and culture, and while the Egyptians at Alexandria were taking up Grecian thought and carrying it back to the land of the Nile, there was growing up on the banks of the Tiber a city which became, because of what it did, the greatest city of the world.

It was, perhaps, a very fortunate thing for Rome that these other great peoples had affairs of their own, so that she was left undisturbed to grow slowly, as all great and lasting nations must grow.

But before we go on to study about Rome, let us recall to mind the most important facts about the country surrounding Rome. Only two or three days' travel by trireme westward from the beautiful island-fringed Greece, and almost in the very middle of the blue Mediterranean, is where the people lived whom we are to study about now. We might, as I have already told you, call the country the "Boot Country," for it resembles a great boot, looking as if it were hung out into the water, and fastened by the upper, or northern, end. Look at the map and see what a long coast line

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this gives Italy, and how friend and foe alike could reach her by water. This fact may lead Rome to become a trading people, and it may finally lead her to go out to the peoples around the Mediterranean to conquer and to rule them. You notice that Italy is not cut to pieces as is Greece by arms of the sea extending far into the land, nor are there numerous islands scattered around her coasts; nor do her mountains, which have good passes, serve to divide the country into small sections, so much as do those of Greece. Thus, because the country is comparatively united, the people tend to become more united.

The eastern coast has no good harbors, and people would seldom enter to trade from that side; but the western coast has several good harbors and fertile plains, and it is from this side that Italy invites people to enter.

We shall sail into the best harbor along the coast. It is the harbor of the Tiber, which leads us into a beautiful plain, where the sky is bluer and the climate pleasanter than even in Greece, if such a thing were possible.

Overlooking this beautiful plain, about fifteen miles up the river Tiber, are the hills upon which Rome was built. In early times, the people who lived in Rome went out in the daytime and tilled the plain, and at night returned to Rome in order that they might be protected. From this it would seem that there were enemies near, would it not? Do you think they were wise in choosing such a place for their city? Indeed it was a very wise choice, because from the hills they

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could overlook their farms, see enemies coming, and protect themselves; and the river too was at hand, upon which they could sail thirty miles or so above Rome and get the products, and then float them out to sea, and work up a good trade with the people living on the Mediterranean.

At first in Rome all land and trade and wealth were owned by the rich people alone, but in time the poor people came to have little farms of their own, which they lived upon and cultivated. I say little farms, but you will be surprised when you know just how small they were. Could you imagine any one with a family living upon a farm of only three or four acres, or about three times the size of the usual school square? Well, the father of the little Roman boy Marius lived on just such a farm. It lay favorably on a gently sloping hillside facing the east, for there the early sun shone upon it. It had a sandy soil which was easily drained, and it was surrounded by a hedge of trees.

The little farm had its vineyard, and Marius enjoyed going about it with his father, trimming branches here and there, for he knew that the wine of the grape made a large part of their living. He watched the olive orchard as it grew, and in the proper season helped his father to press the oil from the olive. The Romans were very fond of olives, and the oil served them as butter.

Marius, of course, could merely help in the things that I have mentioned, but there was one thing that he and his little brother could do alone, and that was to tend the garden patch, which, to be sure, was

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not very large, but sufficient, if well tended, for the father, mother and four children,—for Marius had two sisters and a brother also. Do you think a family of six could have many luxuries, making a living on a four-acre farm?

While the father plowed the ground with a rude plow made from a forked sapling, and the mother and sisters looked after the broods of chickens and geese, Marius and his brother carefully tended the patches of lettuce, turnips, onions, cabbage, carrots and many other things which you see nowadays growing in the gardens in the United States. Marius was not yet old enough to follow the plow, but he had helped his father select the tree from which the plow was made, and watched his father make it, so I am sure he could tell you just how it was made. It was very simple, and yet it seems a little strange to us who never think of making our own plows. But the early Roman farmers, having no manufactories, had to make all their plows by hand; and no matter how poor they were, they could have as many plows as they wished, for all they had to do was to hunt a branched sapling, and sharpen the branch into a long point. This served as a share, to run in the ground, and about midway of the longest part a handle was fastened; to this longer part was hitched an ox to draw it. Do you think these plows were as good as those made in our own manufactories of today? No, they were nothing but sharpened wooden sticks, and besides being very poor for turning the soil, they were hard to sharpen and soon wore dull again.