

Edward Gibbon

In *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1788) Gibbon himself was grateful to Jean Mabillon (1632-1707), Bernard Montfaucon (1655-1741), and Ludovico Muratori (1672-1741) for their collections of facts and documents. The work covers more than 13 centuries from the 2nd century AD to the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Christianity is dealt with in detail, he examines the encroachment of the Teutonic tribes who eventually held the Western Empire in fee, the rise of Islam, and the Crusades. Gibbon viewed the Roman Empire as a single entity in undeviating decline from the ideals of political and intellectual freedom that had characterized the classical literature he had read. For him, the material decay of Rome was the effect and symbol of moral decadence. "Many a sober Christian would rather admit that a wafer is God than that God is a cruel and capricious tyrant." With powerful narrative, fluid prose, and persuasive arguments the work has remained a classic in historical literature.

Edward Gibbon (1737-1794)

He was the son of an English country gentleman and was educated at Magdalen College, Oxford; and, as *Chamber's* points out, "he derived little benefit from either." After schooling in Lausanne, Switzerland (during which time he was to fall in love with the parson's daughter, and to which his father put a quick end) the young Gibbon returned to London where he took up residence in his father's household and found the leisure for scholarly study and bookish solitude.

Gibbon's cynicism, in regards to history, viz., "little more than the register of the crimes, follies and misfortunes of mankind" added "a spice to the work which relates it to literature rather than history. His accuracy in the use of his sources has not been questioned." (*Chamber's*.) Gibbon's major work, of course was his multi-volumed *The History of the Decline & Fall of the Roman Empire* ♦ written through the years, 1776 to 1787 and is the standard history on the Roman civilization. Gibbon was to write an autobiography.