

## *The 'Alimenta' of Nerva and his Successors*

IN his *History of European Morals*, the late Professor Lecky called attention to the growth of a more humane spirit in Rome in the second century after Christ. This spirit may be seen in private and municipal life, and above all in the policy of benevolent intervention adopted by the emperors who ruled during that period. Among other examples of state action, the alimentary grants ('alimenta') made to poor children throughout Italy deserve special attention. The aim of this paper is to give in short form the main evidence bearing on the establishment and administration of the alimentary funds, to suggest some conclusions as to the character of the institution, and to indicate the probable causes of its discontinuance.

Under a system which had grown up in the later days of the republic, great numbers of the Roman populace were already receiving regular state assistance, in the form of corn doles ('frumentationes'). Further gifts of wine, oil, and money ('congiaria') were frequently added at irregular periods; and to these latter distributions at any rate children had been admitted by Augustus.<sup>1</sup> Outside Rome, there was little direct distribution of corn, and such assistance as was given to the poor was provided by the municipalities. Under Nerva a distinctly new departure was made with the establishment of maintenance grants ('alimenta'). Evidence as to this extension of imperial munificence is supplied by Aurelius Victor, an epitomist of the fourth century, who writes of Nerva, 'puellas puerosque natos parentibus egestosis sumptu publico per Italiae oppida ali iussit'.<sup>2</sup> The phrase 'per oppida Italiae' is significant. Previously children had indeed been assisted, but in Rome only. It would seem from the evidence of inscriptions that in another sense also a new development was taking place, namely that the new 'alimenta' were regarded as the gifts made

<sup>1</sup> 'Congiaria populo frequenter dedit. . . . Ac ne minores quidem pueros praeterit, quamvis non nisi ab undecimo aetatis anno accipere consueverunt': Suetonius, *Augustus*, 41. τῷ τε δήμῳ καθ' ἑκατὸν δραχμὰς, προτέρους μὲν τοῖς ἐς ἄνδρας τελοῦσιν, ἔπειτα δὲ καὶ τοῖς παισὶ . . . διένειμα: Dio Cassius, li. 21. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Epitome*, 12.

by the emperor to a class in peculiar need of assistance ; whereas the ' frumentationes ' could be considered as the share due to each citizen from the corn bought with state funds, or furnished as tribute. Both methods henceforth dealt with the relief of the poor, but in Rome alone was there any close connexion between them ; for in Rome administrative machinery for the distribution of corn doles already existed, whereas in the cities of Italy there was as yet no system of poor relief. This is no doubt the reason why ' pueri alimentarii ' or ' magistratus alimentarii ' are never mentioned on inscriptions and coins referring to Rome itself, although such phrases occur frequently in the records of public assistance in other parts of Italy.

The measures of Nerva were evidently of a kind which would appeal to popular sentiment ; for we know that they were thought an adequate excuse for the production of memorial coins. One of these <sup>1</sup> has come down to modern times, and shows the emperor sitting on the curule chair, stretching his right hand towards a boy and girl, while a woman stands near by ; accompanying the figures are the words ' Tutela Italiae '. A similar design appears on coins of Trajan ; and it is interesting to note that a coin of Pope Innocent XII <sup>2</sup> is of a very similar type, and commemorates an endowment not unlike those of fifteen hundred years before. Nerva's policy was continued and developed by his successor, by whom the institution of maintenance grants was put upon a firm basis. In the annals of Dio Cassius, we read of Trajan that

on his entrance into Rome, the Emperor carried out many reforms for the amelioration of the commonwealth and the gratification of the well-affected ; he took especial thought to prove his goodwill also to the cities of Italy in regard to the maintenance of the children.<sup>3</sup>

The truth of this statement is confirmed, and much additional information is supplied, by important inscriptions <sup>4</sup> which have come to light at various places during the last two hundred years. Chief among these are the famous ' Tabula Veleias ',<sup>5</sup> discovered

<sup>1</sup> Eckhel, *Doctrina Numorum Veterum*, vi. 407.

<sup>2</sup> In the Browning Collection, Balliol College Library, Oxford.

<sup>3</sup> Dio Cassius, lxxviii. 5.

<sup>4</sup> These have been collected by Ruggiero, *Dizionario Epigr.* i. 402.

<sup>5</sup> *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, xi. 1147. The preamble runs : ' Obligatio praediorum ob HS deciens quadraginta quattuor milia, ut ex indulgentia optimi maximique principis Imp. Caes. Nerae Traiani Aug. Germanici Dacici pueri puellae alimenta accipiant, legitimi n(umero) CCXLV in singulos HS XVI n(umum), f(iunt) HS XLVII XL, legitimae n(umero) XXXIV, sing(ulae) HS XII n(umum), f(iunt) HS IV DCCCXCVI, spurii I HS CXLIV, spuria I HS CXX. Summa HS LII CC. quae fit usura ——— (i.e. 5 per cent.) sortis supra scriptae. ' Then follows a list of the estates mortgaged, valued at a sum at least ten times as much as the sum received. As an appendix to the main inscription is added another list called the ' obligatio praediorum facta per Cornelium Gallicanum ob HS LXXII '. The interest on this

in 1747 at Veleia near Placentia, and the 'Tabula Ligurum Baebianorum',<sup>1</sup> discovered in 1832 near Beneventum. Both these inscriptions are lists of estates on which mortgages had been arranged, the capital being provided by Trajan, and the interest going to the maintenance of children in the vicinity. The emperor's purpose was clearly to invest money in such a way that a steady and permanent income should be forthcoming, for the assistance both of present and future generations.<sup>2</sup> No mention is made of any term of years; and it has, therefore, been concluded that Trajan did not intend even to call in the principal. If this was the case, and if, as seems probable,<sup>3</sup> only a low rate of interest was charged, the arrangement would benefit the landowners hardly less than the families assisted. Probably, therefore, among the other motives of the emperor, we must reckon a desire to help small landowners.<sup>4</sup>

The fullest literary reference to Trajan's policy of assisting poor children is found in the famous *Panegyricus*,<sup>5</sup> pronounced in his honour by Pliny in A.D. 100. In this address, which is marked by rhetorical adulation rather than clearness of statement, Pliny describes the throngs of children brought by their parents to greet Trajan on his first entry into Rome. The word 'alimenta' is used again and again, but as there is no mention of children living outside Rome, it is now generally held<sup>6</sup> that Pliny is referring to gifts made by the emperor in Rome before

sum will provide *alimenta* for eighteen boys, at 16 sesterces a month, and one girl, at 12 sesterces.

<sup>1</sup> *Corpus Inscript. Latin.* ix. 1455.

<sup>2</sup> Pliny the Younger (*Epistula*, vii. 18), describing his own alimentary endowment at Comum, says: 'In order to raise 500,000 sesterces, which I had promised for the maintenance of free-born children, I put into the hands of the public agent a piece of land worth a far larger sum; this same property I received back again, after the imposition of a rent, engaging myself to pay 30,000 sesterces a year.'

<sup>3</sup> The rate was only 5 per cent., instead of the 12 per cent. which was usual; and as the interest was reckoned on a sum only one-tenth or one-twelfth of the value of the property, the amount paid each year was trifling in proportion to the real value of the land. Pliny evidently thought his property would be only lightly burdened, for he says (*loc. cit.*), 'the land, greatly exceeding in value the rent-charge, will always find a tenant to cultivate it'. The rate of interest, in this instance, was 6 per cent.

<sup>4</sup> Careful examination has shown that the emperor made at least three assignments of money at Veleia, and at least ten among the Ligures. Certain early critics assumed that alimentary funds were instituted in all the municipalities in one year. In this they were clearly wrong. See Henzen's article on the 'alimenta' in *Annali dell'Institut.*, 1844. Mommsen (on the Tabula Baebiana, *Corpus Inscript. Latin.* ix. 1455, and *Staatsrecht*, ii. 3. 1079) suggests that Trajan made assignments of money at frequent intervals, perhaps of six months, during the first part of his reign. Mommsen is followed by Henzen and Marquardt, *Staatsverwaltung*, ii. 2. 141.

<sup>5</sup> Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 26-8.

<sup>6</sup> See Hirschfeld's article on 'Die Getreideverwaltung in der römischen Kaiserzeit' in *Philologus* ~~xxx. 1870~~. Sauppe, on the other hand (*Philologus*, xxx), argues that the *Panegyric* does refer to the Italian alimentary grants, and is proof of their early date.

the new measures in Italy were carried into effect. The main significance of the passage lies in the motive which it emphasizes; for Pliny plainly tells the emperor that his generous policy towards the children will lead to an increase in the number of children born; he speaks strongly in favour of such a policy: 'nullum est enim magno principe . . . impendii genus dignius quam quod erogatur in posteros;' <sup>1</sup> and again: 'bonus princeps . . . fiducia sui procreatos nisi larga manu fovet . . . occasum imperii, occasum reipublicae accelerat.'<sup>2</sup> Later, in the same connexion, Pliny touches upon the constant need of recruits for the army, saying: 'Hi subsidium bellorum, ornamentum pacis, publicis sumptibus aluntur. . . . Ex his castra, ex his tribus replebuntur.'<sup>3</sup> Thus it is clear that the establishment of maintenance grants was not merely a philanthropic measure, but formed part of a deliberate attempt to increase the population of Italy.<sup>4</sup>

To return to the evidence of inscriptions. Further records of alimentary grants have been found at Ameria in Central Italy, Auximum in Umbria, and Terracina on the Latin coast.<sup>5</sup> Although these give little more than the names and titles of the emperor, and are a mere formal record of the gratitude of the townspeople, they are important as proving how widely the grants extended. Two coins,<sup>6</sup> belonging to the years 104 and 112, and similar in type to that struck in the time of Nerva, bear the words 'Alim[enta] Ital[iae]'. Since all such dates as can be fixed fall between 100 and 112, it is generally assumed that most of the endowments were made during this period. Such later endowments as are mentioned by the historians were apparently made on exceptional occasions and intended to commemorate some special event. Of the alimentary measures of Hadrian, Trajan's successor, very little is known. There is only one literary reference. The historian Spartianus, writing about a century and a half later, records that the emperor 'pueris ac puellis, quibus etiam Traianus alimenta detulerat, incrementum adiecit.'<sup>7</sup> The exact interpretation of these words is doubtful. The jurist Ulpian, who died in 228, tells us that Hadrian ordained that boys should receive grants until they reached the age of eighteen, and girls

<sup>1</sup> *Panegyricus*, 28. 3.

<sup>2</sup> 28. 5.

<sup>3</sup> 28. 2. Pliny elsewhere uses the phrase 'alimenta de tuo', i.e. from the *fiscus*, which was the emperor's private treasury, although derived from public sources. This is not inconsistent with the phrase 'publicis sumptibus', or the 'sumptu publico' of Aurelius Victor—see above, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Corpus Inscript. Latin.* vi. 1492, an inscription in which the people of Ferentum refer to the 'cura alimentaria' as a means by which Trajan 'aeternitati Italiae suae prospexit'.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* x. 4351, ix. 5825, and x. 6310.

<sup>6</sup> Cohen, ii. 2. 18, and ii. 35, 51.

<sup>7</sup> *Hadrian*, 7.

till fourteen.<sup>1</sup> It has, therefore, been suggested that the words of Spartianus refer to an extension of the age limit. A further establishment of maintenance grants, this time to girls only, was made by Antoninus Pius, in honour of the Empress Faustina upon her death.<sup>2</sup> This is perhaps one of the first occasions on which an endowment for the assistance of the poor was made by a husband in memory of his wife. The testimony of Capitolinus—an historian of the third century whose authority is none of the best—is confirmed by the discovery of a coin, bearing the inscription 'Puellae Faustinianae', and showing the emperor surrounded by a group of his beneficiaries.<sup>3</sup> Three other coins have no inscription, but suggest by their types that further grants were made in the years 151, 160, and 161.

About this time the young people benefiting by the imperial generosity—or the public authorities in their name—began to put on record their gratitude to their patron. An inscription of this sort was erected by the 'pueri et puellae alimentarii' of Cupra Montana. Another comes from Urbinum, and a third from Sentinum,<sup>4</sup> sixteen miles away. Marcus Aurelius also showed an interest in the maintenance grants, for Capitolinus relates<sup>5</sup> that on the occasion of the marriage of Verus to the emperor's daughter, Lucilla, fresh names were added to the lists. Further, in 173, Marcus enrolled 'novas puellas Faustianas', in honour of his wife, the younger Faustina, who had died two years before. Elsewhere Capitolinus tells us that Marcus 'carried out many wise reforms in regard to the public food doles', but what these reforms were he does not relate. An inscription put up in 162 by the 'pueri et puellae alimentarii Ficolensium' is dedicated 'Optimo et indulgentissimo principi'.<sup>6</sup>

The next literary evidence to the institution belongs to the reign of Pertinax, and shows us that the alimentary funds did not long remain secure. For Capitolinus, writing of the year 193, only about thirty years after the dedication just mentioned, tells us that this emperor 'alimentaria etiam compendia, quae novem annorum ex instituto Traiani debebantur, obdurata verecundia, sustulit.'<sup>7</sup> Only one more foundation is recorded.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Digest*, xxxiv.

<sup>2</sup> 'Puellas alimentarias in honorem Faustinae Faustianas constituit': Capitolinus, 8. <sup>3</sup> Eckhel, vii. 40; see also vii. 48.

<sup>4</sup> *Corpus Inscript. Latin.* ix. 5700, xi. 5957, xi. 6002.

<sup>5</sup> 'Ob hanc coniunctionem pueros et puellas novorum nominum frumentariae perceptioni adscribi praeceperunt,' Capitolinus, *Marcus Aurelius*, 7; 'novas puellas Faustianas instituit in honorem uxoris mortuae,' 26; 'de alimentis publicis multa prudenter invenit,' 11.

<sup>6</sup> *Corpus Inscript. Latin.* xiv. 4003.

<sup>7</sup> *Pertinax*, 9.

<sup>8</sup> 'Puellas et pueros, quemadmodum Antoninus Faustianas instituerat, Mammaeanae et Mammaeanae instituit': Lampridius, *Alex. Sev.* 7.

In the reign of Alexander Severus, some forty years later, the emperor, moved no doubt by the example of the Antonines, made a new enrolment of children, in honour of his mother Mammaea. In thus connecting a charitable institution with the names of ladies of the imperial household, the later emperors seem to emphasize the philanthropic rather than political purpose of their grants; and we must distinguish these later endowments, which were probably on quite a small scale, from the organized poor relief of Trajan. The 'puellae Faustinianae' or 'Mammaeanae' were in very much the same position as those children who benefited by the private alimentary endowments,<sup>1</sup> which we know existed in a considerable number of Italian and provincial towns. The 'state-aided' children were no doubt many more in number, if we may judge from the many inscriptions which tell of 'magistratus alimentarii' of high official standing. This brings us to the question of the administration.

In the inscription from Veleia, we read of two men, C. Cornelius Gallicanus and T. Pomponius Bassus, who were entrusted with the investment of the money. We know from other sources that both Gallicanus<sup>2</sup> and Bassus were men of consular rank, who had already attained to positions of some dignity. Bassus had wide provincial experiences, having served as legate in Asia, Cappadocia, and Galatia. An interesting inscription from Ferentinum,<sup>3</sup> a little town in Latium, throws light upon his administration of the 'alimenta' in that district. Recording his adoption as patron of their town, the Ferentini say:

Inasmuch as all have declared that T. Pomponius Bassus, in accordance with his generous nature, has carried out the task committed to his charge by our most beneficent emperor . . . (aiming therein at the everlasting prosperity of his country Italy) in such a way that all ages owe thanks to his administration; and inasmuch as a man of so deservedly high reputation would be of service to our town . . . it has pleased the conscript fathers that envoys . . . be dispatched to Pomponius Bassus, to beg him to deign to take our municipality into the patronage of his most noble house. . . .

<sup>1</sup> The private endowments do not strictly fall within the scope of this paper; but the inscriptions recording them are of very great interest, both for their own sake and as throwing light upon the imperial scheme. The most important are: *Corpus Inscript. Latin.* x. 5056, from Atina (in Italy)—this dates from time of Augustus; ii. 1174, from Hispalis (in Spain); viii. 1641, from Sicca (in Africa); viii. 980, from Curubis (in Africa); x. 6328, from Terracina (in Italy); xi. 1602, from Florentia (in Italy); xiv. 350, from Ostia (in Italy); v. 5262, from Comum (in Italy). The last records the endowment of Pliny. See above, p. 7, n. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Cornelius Gallicanus, legate in Narbonensis, A.D. 83 (*Corpus Inscript. Latin.* xii. 2602).

<sup>3</sup> Pomponius Bassus, adopted as patron of the Ferentini, A.D. 101 or 102 (*Corpus Inscript. Latin.* vi. 1492).

In a letter of Pliny,<sup>1</sup> we hear of Bassus as a man who had 'held the highest magistracies, controlled armies, and devoted himself entirely to the service of the state'. It is surely not rash to conclude that such a leading man would not have been asked to undertake the investment of the money, unless the scheme had from the beginning been one of some magnitude. Apparently Bassus and Gallicanus, and a third commissioner whose name is not given, had no official title, but were 'extra ordinem' in the sense that a definite hierarchy of alimentary officials had not yet been constituted. That such a hierarchy was soon formed is proved by the large number of inscriptions which refer to 'magistratus alimentarii',<sup>2</sup> and extend to every part of Italy. These fall into two classes, the imperial officials, and those appointed by the municipalities. How the work was divided must be left to the imagination, but we may assume that most of the executive work, in this as in other spheres of public service, was in the hands of the local authorities.

Among imperial offices, that of the 'praefectus alimentorum' ranked highest. More than a dozen inscriptions point to a close connexion between the alimentary administration and the 'curae viarum'.<sup>3</sup> Apparently under Hadrian and Antoninus Pius the district marked out for both purposes was the same, and both branches of the public service were entrusted to one man, an official of praetorian rank. Distinct from the prefects over a specified district are those officials who had the title 'praefectus alimentorum' without any local limitation. The individuals mentioned are, without exception, of consular rank.<sup>4</sup> The inscriptions which refer to them appear at the end of the reign of Marcus Aurelius, and continue for only about forty years. During this period there are no inscriptions referring to district prefectures. Hirschfeld has, therefore, suggested that an attempt was made to centralize the administration, but that the earlier method was returned to again under Macrinus.<sup>5</sup> Next in rank to the prefects

<sup>1</sup> *Epistle*, iv. 23.

<sup>2</sup> The administration of the *alimenta* is discussed by Hirschfeld in *Die kaiserlichen Verwaltungsbeamten*, pp. 212 f. See also Ruggiero, *Dix. Epigr.* i. 402, and Mommsen, *Staatsrecht*, ii. 2. 949, and *Hermes*, iii. 124.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. *Corpus Inscript. Latin.* ii. 4510 'curator viae Flam. praefectus alimentorum'; *ibid.* vi. 1509 'curator viae Salariae et alimentorum'. Orelli, *Inscript. Latin. Select. Collect.* 3935 'praefectus alimentorum per Aemiliam'. *Corpus Inscript. Latin.* xi. 6338, shows how closely (and incorrectly) titles were combined, 'cur. viae et praefectus aliment. Clodiae et cohaerent'. Inscriptions prove that the 'cura alimentorum' was combined with the charge of the following roads: Aemilia, Appia, Clodia, Flaminia, Tiburtina, Valeria, Salaria.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* v. 7783, x. 3805, xiv. 3809. Spartianus, *Life of Didius Julianus*, 1-2, says: 'consulatum meruit, testimonio imperatoris; Catos etiam debellavit; inde Dalmatiam regendam accepit. . . post Germaniam inferiorem rexit; post hoc curam alimentorum in Italia meruit.' Cf. Capitolinus, *Life of Pertinax*, 3-4.

<sup>5</sup> Hirschfeld (*loc. cit.*) connects this centralization with the establishment by

come the 'procuratores alimentorum',<sup>1</sup> who either took the place of the prefects in districts where there was no important road, or, in the case of the Flamintan and Aemilian districts, were appointed in addition to the prefect. The names and titles recorded are quite enough to prove that we are dealing not with a small or localized effort at poor relief, but rather with a widely extended scheme, based upon deliberate policy, such as could be applied to all parts of Italy, and yet could be controlled by central authorities. Among municipal offices, as distinct from imperial, the 'quaestura alimentorum' ranks unexpectedly high. In many cases it was the last stage in a man's municipal career before reaching the highest office, that of the 'duumviratus iuridicundo'; in other cases the alimentary quaestorship and the duumvirate were held together, and in some instances this quaestorship was held last of all. A certain diversity in title appears, and it seems probable that the emperor permitted the local authorities to administer the funds in whatever way seemed best, either by combining the new functions with those of an office already existing, or by appointing a separate official.<sup>2</sup> The existence of these officials has been definitely proved in about forty towns scattered over every part of Italy. Their high place in municipal administration shows that the alimentary fund was no insignificant department of the city treasury, but affected a considerable number of the families on the city register.

Our evidence as to the number of children assisted is very meagre. This is unfortunate, for it is difficult to appreciate the real significance of the institution unless we know whether the assistance reached a large proportion of the population, or was limited to a few of the very poor. Among the inscriptions recording public grants,<sup>3</sup> the Tabula Veleias alone gives definite information. There we find that 264 boys and 36 girls were

Marcus Aurelius of the magistrates known as 'iuridici', who apparently formed a sort of supervisory board over Italian administration, and may have added the 'cura alimentorum' to their other duties. Their powers were reduced by Macrinus. This whole theory is attacked by Mommsen, *Staatsrecht*, ii. 2. 1080.

<sup>1</sup> See *Corpus Inscript. Latin.* iii. 8753, viii. 822. The title sometimes varied: ii. 4238 'procurator Augusti ab alimentis'; vi. 1633 and 1634 'procurator ad alimenta'.

<sup>2</sup> (a) Officials appointed separately: The title 'quaestor alimentorum' appears twenty times. Other titles are: 'quaestor alimentorum Caesaris'; 'quaestor sacrae pecuniae alimentariae'; 'quaestor pecuniae alimentorum publicorum'; 'curator pecuniae alimentariae'. An example of a subordinate is given in *Corpus Inscript. Latin.* ix. 699 'servus arkarius, qui et ante egit rationem alimentariam sub cura praefectorum annis xxxii'.

(b) Magistrates who combined two or more offices: *ibid.* x. 20 'quaestor pecuniae publicae et alimentariae'; *ibid.* x. 5920 'quaestor aerarii et alimentorum'. Other titles are 'duovir et curator alimentorum distribuendorum' and 'duovir alimentorum quaestor curator sacrae pecuniae'.

<sup>3</sup> Among the private endowments, at Sicca probably 300 of each sex were assisted; at Terracina, 100 of each; at Hispalis perhaps 50 of each.



enrolled. But as the population of Veleia is not known, these figures do not help much towards a general conclusion. The whole question of the population of Italy in ancient times is discussed by Dr. Julius Beloch,<sup>1</sup> who reaches the conclusion that in the year A.D. 47 the number of male adult citizens in an average Italian municipality may be reckoned as somewhere about 3,000; another 3,000 would represent the women and another 3,000 the children. If for the moment we may adopt these figures as applying to Veleia, we find that only 10 per cent. of the children were assisted; a much smaller proportion than the dignity of the magistrates in charge of the work would lead us to expect. It is tempting to use the alimentation figures in support of Dr. Beloch's argument that the population of Italy was over-estimated by earlier scholars; but it is probably wiser to draw no conclusions, when the data are so uncertain. As to the sex of the children, it is clear from coins, inscriptions, and literary notices alike, that both girls and boys were included in the scheme. This was natural, if the primary aim of the institution was to check a decline in the population. In Rome itself the distributions of corn made to the adult population reached males only. It has, therefore, been suggested<sup>2</sup> that in Rome girls did not at first share in the alimentary allotment. According to this view, the endowment in memory of Faustina was designed to repair this omission. Whatever may have been the case in Rome, we know that outside the capital both sexes were assisted from the beginning. At Veleia, out of 300 children only 36 were girls; this inequality in the number benefited is unexpected. Apparently in this case the commissioner in charge of the business had instructions that grants should be made more readily to boys than to girls. Whether this was in view of future military requirements we cannot say, but such considerations may well have influenced those responsible for the choice. There is also an inequality in the value of the allowances, since the boys received sixteen sesterces a month, and the girls only twelve. Thus a greater incentive was offered to parents for the rearing of boys than of girls. There may, indeed, have been more boys to enrol, owing to the more frequent exposure of female children.<sup>3</sup>

Pliny tells us in his *Panegyric* that the children assisted by Trajan were 'free-born'. A similar limitation is mentioned in

<sup>1</sup> *Die Bevölkerung der Griechisch-Römischen Welt*, Leipzig, 1886. See also Eduard Meyer, *Die Bevölkerung des Altertums in the Handwörterbuch der Staatswissenschaften*, vol. ii, 2nd ed., pp. 674 f.

<sup>2</sup> See Henzen in *Annali dell' Instit.*, 1844, p. 24. He is followed by Hirschfeld, *Philologus*, xxix. 10, and opposed by Sauppe, *Philologus*, xxx. 134, and Marquardt, *Staatsverwaltung*, ii. 139, n. 4.

<sup>3</sup> See Merivale, *The Romans under the Empire*, viii. 57.

the records of private endowments,<sup>1</sup> and we may probably assume that the restriction was general. It is somewhat surprising to find that at Veleia two illegitimate children, and only two, are specially mentioned; they are to receive grants less in value than those made to the other boys and girls. This disadvantage naturally suggests that the government wished to encourage legal marriage; but one cannot help wondering why these two children are mentioned at all. The simplest explanation seems to be that their presence in this case was due to personal favouritism.

The questions of the form and value of alimentary dole raise problems of great interest to the economic historian. By far the most important part of the diet of the Italian people in ancient times consisted in wheat. It was natural, therefore, that the cheapening or free bestowal of corn should be the means most often adopted of winning the favour of the people or improving the lot of the poor. The quantity generally allotted to each recipient in the ordinary public distribution in Rome was five modii (nearly one and a quarter bushels) a month, and this was considered to be more than adequate for the entire sustenance of a grown-up man for that period.<sup>2</sup> When the distributions were so extended as to include children, the most convenient method, in Rome at any rate, was to add the names of children to the lists of those already in receipt of corn. Thus, when a new enrollment was made by Marcus Aurelius, 'pueros et puellas . . . frumentariae perceptioni adscribi praeceperunt'.<sup>3</sup> The coin types of Trajan and Hadrian show ears of corn offered to children; and the epitaph of a child<sup>4</sup> who belonged to the foundation of the younger Faustina shows, by its wording, that these children did in fact receive their allowance in the form of corn. Outside Rome there was very little free distribution of corn, and it is therefore not surprising to find that at Veleia the grants were made in money. Here it is recorded that sixteen sesterces should go to each legitimate boy, twelve sesterces to each legitimate girl, twelve to an illegitimate boy, and ten to an illegitimate girl. It would be rash to conclude that the practice here recorded of one small town proves the existence of a general scale prescribed by the central authorities. But it is not improbable that such a scale existed, and this conjecture is somewhat strengthened when we come to consider the real value of the money allotted.

Any attempt to give the modern English equivalent of Roman

<sup>1</sup> At Comum (Pliny's endowment) and at Hispalia.

<sup>2</sup> See Marquardt, *Staatsverwaltung*, ii. 107. Cato, *De Re Rustica*, recommends that a slave should be allowed 4 modii in winter, 4½ in summer. Soldiers were allowed 4 modii.

<sup>3</sup> See above, p. 9, n. 5.

<sup>4</sup> She is described as 'Sexta Saturnina ingenus frumento publico Divae Faustinae Iunioris'.

money is, of course, misleading, unless one can determine the purchasing power of the money at any given period. It is tempting, in this connexion, to apply the information as to prices given us in the famous edict of Diocletian,<sup>1</sup> published in A.D. 301. But so great had been the alteration in the value of money during the intervening years, and so difficult is it to determine the relation between maximum and average prices, that such a use of the edict must reluctantly be abandoned. Mommsen<sup>2</sup> has calculated that in the later days of the republic the average price of corn in Rome was four sesterces a modium. Mommsen's figure has been accepted by Marquardt and Hirschfeld and by Beloch. There is no evidence that the price of corn altered to any considerable extent between the end of the republic and the time of Trajan; and, failing such evidence, it is probably not too bold to treat Mommsen's figure as applicable to the later period. Turning to the *Tabula Veleias*, we find that the monthly allowance of sixteen sesterces would enable each boy to purchase in Rome four modii of corn. The monthly allowance to adults was usually five modii, but Friedländer,<sup>3</sup> following Marquardt, has pointed out that this amount was intended to be, more than sufficient for one man. He calculates that a man's average monthly consumption was probably less than four modii. So, if the inhabitants of Veleia could buy their corn at the price at which it was offered in Rome, the allowance of sixteen sesterces a month would purchase considerably more than was necessary to feed a boy for that period; a small sum would remain for vegetables and other kinds of food. Certainly the cost of living would vary in different parts of Italy; but we may conjecture that the officials who drew up the scheme of allowances bore in mind the price of corn in Rome, and fixed the allowance of money at a sum which would be sufficient to provide the entire maintenance of a child. This conclusion is supported by the use of the words 'alimenta' and 'alere', which suggest more than a small contribution to the family income.

Whatever the original object of the institution, it is certain that the grants made in money would not long maintain their initial value. This leads us to a consideration of the reasons why the institution so quickly disappeared. For though the existence of alimentary officials may be traced to the reign of Gordian, and probably as late as Diocletian, after that time no indication of the institution survives.<sup>4</sup> Modern historians have written very

<sup>1</sup> *Corpus Inscript. Latin.* iii. 1926. The edict is described, and in part translated, in Abbott, *The Common People of Ancient Rome*, cap. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Mommsen, *History of Rome*, i. 851 a; Marquardt, *Staatsverwaltung*, ii. 108, n. 3; Hirschfeld, *Die Gemeindeverwaltung*, p. 68; Beloch, *Bevölkerung*, p. 397.

<sup>3</sup> *Roman Life and Manners*, appendices, p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> The *Codex* of Theodosius, xi. 27, contains a law of Constantine, dating from

little on this subject, and have generally dismissed it with a brief reference to the political and economic confusion of the third century. Ancient authorities are also silent, with the exception of Capitolinus, who tells us in the passage already quoted that in A.D. 193 'Pertinax, with hardened heart, cancelled nine years' arrears *ex instituto Traiani*'. Evidently, as early as this date, one emperor at any rate sought to relieve his financial difficulties by withholding alimentary payments which had become customary. Whether the words imply that the investments in land had been supplemented by direct grants from public revenues, or whether they refer to a stoppage of the income from land on its way to the legal recipients, they do at least show that the institution was in serious danger.

The mortgage lists mention no term of years after which the principal would be called in; but even if Trajan intended that his beneficence should last for ever, other and less charitable emperors may not have carried out his intention. The sums lent to the landowners may have been recalled. Further, in some parts of Italy, the agricultural depression which followed on the visitations of plague was so great that many of the farmers may have been unable to pay even the low charges with which their lands were burdened. In other cases the money perhaps failed to reach the object for which it was intended. In the period of political chaos before the accession of Diocletian, the central control over administration was relaxed, and it is quite likely that the local magistrates diverted the alimentary revenues to meet more pressing needs. But even where the alimentary funds continued to exist, the real value of the doles would be greatly reduced, as the purchasing power of money declined. Diocletian's edict of maximum prices was an attempt to cope with this rise, and the emperor expresses himself horrified at what he calls the 'avarice' of the merchants, and the consequent misery of the poor. When the public need was so pressing, the alimentary money, now comparatively insignificant in value, may well have been absorbed into the general revenues of a town, and its original purpose forgotten.

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A.D. 315, in which magistrates are told that if a parent brings a child whom he is prevented by poverty from bringing up, they must not hesitate to provide 'alimenta' and clothes. Probably this has no connexion with the institution of Trajan, but it is interesting to see that some attempt was being made to cope with the problems of poverty; possibly we may see here the effect of Christian teaching on charity.