

4 WHAT ROME WAS BUILT WITH

Art was despised, and in his second oration against Verres, the great collector, Cicero, faithful to the maxims of the Republic, speaks with disdain of the arts and works of the most famous artists, even affecting to be unacquainted with their names. He regarded the taste as unworthy of the Romans; although later it seems that he himself became infected with the collector's enthusiasm.

The treasures of Greek art, plundered by Roman generals, woke in the spoilers first the passion for collecting, which later they indulged with such boundless extravagance. It would seem that in many cases, then as now, the rarity of the object rather than its beauty was the attraction to the buyer.

Horace deplored that the Romans who sojourned in Greece adopted the customs of that country, and severely reprovved those of his countrymen who loved gold, ivory and marbles, at the same time praising poverty and simplicity.

Later the desire to embellish their city took hold of the Romans; and Pliny who, as we have already seen, passionately disapproved of this fashion, mourns the fact that, although there were still in existence censorial laws forbidding dormice and other delicacies to be served at table, 'no law has been passed forbidding marble to be imported, or the seas to be traversed in search of it!'¹

This mania for rare and costly building material brought from a distance of thousands of miles began about 144 B. C., and it is said that Quintus Metellus Macedonicus was the first to introduce it into Rome.²

¹ Pliny, *op. cit.*, Book xxxvi, chap. 2.

² The celebrated Niger Lapis of the Roman Forum, which has given rise to so much discussion, was probably the first piece of marble ever brought to Rome; but it can hardly be connected