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L. SPRAGUE de CAMP'S

"Lest Darkness Fall"

A Review in Verse

by Randall Garrett

(who also did the design)

These rhymes are perpetrated in the spirit of good fun, and no offense to either author or story is intended. In all cases, the author has seen the parody.

The reader's tossed into this tale with great impetuosity.
The hero, struck by lightning, sees a burst of luminosity!
His vision clears, and he is overcome with curiosity—

The lightning's tossed him back in Time to ancient Gothic Rome!
At first, poor Martin Padway thinks he's stricken with insanity,
To find himself immersed in early Roman Christianity,
But finally he buckles down to face it with urbanity;

He knows that he's forever stuck and never will get home.

Now, Europe's just about to start the Age of Faith and Piety,
 And such an awful future fills our hero with anxiety,
 So he begins to bolster up this barbarous society
 With modernistic gadgets that the Romans haven't got.
 A moneylending Syrian of singular sagacity
 Succumbs, in time, to Mr. P's remarkable tenacity,
 And, though he makes remarks decrying Mattin's vast audacity,
 Proceeds to lend him quite a lot of money on the spot.

Now, in return, our hero starts, in manner most emphatical,
 To show the banker how to solve his problems mathematical.
 And one clerk gets so sore he ups and takes a leave sabbatical;
 "I can't take Arab numerals," he says; "I've had my fill!"
 But Mr. Padway takes the resignation with passivity.
 The other men have shown a mathematical proclivity,
 So, confident the system will increase their productivity,
 He takes his borrowed money and goes out and buys a still.

Then, trading in on what he knows about historiography,
 Our Martin Padway next invents the art of mass typography.
 He hires a bunch of Roman scribes (He's fond of their chirography),
 And makes them all reporters for his paper: *Roman Times*.
 Because of a Sicilian he fired without apology,
 He gets in lots of trouble on a charge of demonology.
 But, using all the very best of Freudian psychology,
 He gets himself released from prosecution for the crimes.

The Roman city governor, a certain Count Honorius
 (A man who is notorious for actions amatorious),
 Is then convinced by Padway, in a very long, laborious,
 And detailed explanation of how corporations work,
 That he (the Count), in order to insure his own prosperity,
 Should use his cash to back, with all expedient celerity,
 A telegraphic system Padway's building for posterity.
 The Count proceeds to do so, with an avaricious smirk.

But while our hero is engaged in projects multifarious,
 An army of Imperialists under Belisarius
 Invades the Goths, who find that their position is precarious,
 So Padway has to help the Gothic army win the fight.
 He saves the King from being killed, to win his royal gratitude,
 And though our hero's hampered by the King's fogheaded attitude,
 He gets appointed Quaestor, which affords him lots of latitude.
 He whips the Greek invaders in the middle of the night.

The King becomes so useless that he's almost parasitical,
 And Padway finds himself up to his neck in things political;
 He has to learn to tread with care, and not be hypercritical
 Of how affairs are run in the Italo-Gothic state.
 The Byzantines send in another army with rapidity,
 And Bloody John, the general, attacks with great avidity.
 Because the Gothic nation lacks political solidity,
 The Byzantines march northward at a very rapid rate.

The Greeks go up through Italy with thundering and plundering;
 The Gothic troops, as always, just continue with their blundering,
 While Martin Padway, at their head, is worrying and wondering
 Just what the Hell he's gonna do and where he's gonna go!
 At last he comes in contact with Joannas Sanguinarius!
 (The battle's very bloody, but de Camp makes it hilarious.)
 And just as he's about to lose, the turncoat Belisarius
 Comes charging in with cavalry and quickly routs the foe!

Now, though all through the novel we've been jollied with jocundity,
 The story's ended on a note of very great profundity:
 The Roman-Goth society's been saved from moribundity!
 For two years, Padway's been in Rome—and things have sure
 changed since!

The greatest fighting man in Rome since Emperor Aurelian,
 The sneaky little tricks he pulls are quite Mephistophelian;
 Though modest and retiring once, he's changed like a chameleon
 To something like a character from Machiavelli's "Prince"!

