

XII

MILITARY ANARCHY

(192-285)

Pertinax and Didius Julianus (192-193).—Pertinax, prefect of the city, proclaimed emperor by the murderers of Commodus, was recognized by the senate and the prætorians, but, when he tried to restore order in the state and the finances, he displeased the soldiers, who murdered him in his palace. Then began scenes without a name, and happily without example. The soldiers literally put the empire up at auction. Two purchasers presented themselves, who rivalled each other in promises. The monarchy of Augustus was adjudged to the aged ex-consul, Didius Julianus, at 6250 drachmas for each soldier. The sale finished, the prætorians in battle array conducted Didius to the palace, and the senators accepted the man whom the soldiers had elected. He had promised more than he could perform. The creditors, implacable toward their imprudent debtor, would no doubt have overthrown him themselves, had they not been forestalled by the legions of the frontiers, who also wished to bestow the empire. The British legions proclaimed their chief Albinus; the Syrians, Pescennius Niger; the Albanians, the African Septimius Severus. The latter being the nearest to Rome immediately set out for the capital. The senate, encouraged by his approach, declared Didius a public enemy, had him slain, punished the murderers of Pertinax and recognized Severus as emperor.

Septimius Severus (193-211).—He broke the power of the prætorians; but, instead of abolishing that turbulent guard, he contented himself with certain changes and even rendered it more numerous. In Asia Minor he defeated Niger, who was killed while about to flee to the Parthians (194). Near Lyons he overthrew Albinus (197), whose head he sent to the senate with a threatening letter. On his return to Rome, he multiplied the executions. Forty-one

senatorial families became extinct under the headsman's axe.

To extenuate his cruelties by a little glory, he endeavored to seize Seleucia and Ctesiphon from the Parthians, who had made an alliance with Niger. On his return he ordered a persecution against the Christians, in spite of the eloquent apologies of Tertullian and Minutius Felix. Severus administered the finances with economy. After his death corn sufficient for seven years was found in the granaries at Rome. "Keep the soldiers contented," he said to his children, "and do not trouble yourselves about the rest. With them you can repulse the barbarians and repress the people." Military discipline was strictly maintained, but at the same time the soldiers obtained privileges and increase of pay. After a few quiet years Severus was called to Britain by a revolt which he had no difficulty in quelling. He penetrated a great distance into the Caledonian mountains, but incessantly harassed and worn out by continual attacks which cost him as many as 50,000 men, he returned to the policy of Antoninus, and constructed a wall from one shore to the other along the line traced by Agricola.

During this expedition he had been constantly ill. Nevertheless his son Bassianus, called Caracalla from the name of a Gallic garment which he was fond of wearing, could not wait for his approaching end, and tried to assassinate him. From that time the emperor's malady increased. He expired with the words: "I have been everything, and everything is nothing." His last countersign had been "laboremus." He left two sons, Caracalla and Geta.

Caracalla (211-217).—The two princes had already disturbed the palace by their quarrels. On his return to Rome Caracalla stabbed his brother in the arms of their mother. Papinianus, refusing to make a public defence of the fratricide, was put to death and with him perished 20,000 partisans of Geta. Caracalla made his cruelty felt in all the provinces, particularly at Alexandria, where in order to avenge himself for some epigrams he ordered a massacre of the unarmed people. A centurion, who had an injury to revenge, killed him.

Macrinus (217).—The army elected the prefect of the guards Macrinus, who, after a sanguinary battle with the Parthians in Mesopotamia, purchased peace at the price of 50,000,000 denarii; but the severe measures which he took

for the restoration of discipline destroyed his popularity. The soldiers mutinied in their camp, proclaimed Bassianus, the young and handsome high priest of Emesa, and massacred Macrinus.

Heliogabalus (218-222).—Bassianus, better known as Heliogabalus from the Syrian god whose priest he was, brought to Rome the most shameful passions of the East. His luxury and depravity would have made Nero blush. He formed for himself a senate of women and, like the great king, wished to be adored. His palace was strewn with gold and silver dust, and his fish ponds filled with rose water in which to bathe. The soldiers were soon horrified at this unnatural emperor, who attired himself in women's clothes. They killed him, together with his mother Sœmis, and saluted as emperor his cousin Alexander, aged fourteen, who remained under the guidance of his grandmother Mæsa and his mother Mamæa.

Alexander Severus (222-235).—The two empresses devoted themselves to developing the natural virtues of the young prince. They gave him as ministers the lawyers Paulus and Ulpianus and formed for him a council of twelve senators. The empire passed many peaceful years under his reign. On the front of his palace these words, the foundation of all social morality, were carved: "Do unto others as thou wouldest have them do unto thee." Nevertheless, his hand was not firm enough to maintain discipline among the soldiers. One day they slew their prefect Ulpianus under his very eyes.

The ruin of the Parthian kingdom and the foundation of a second Persian empire by the Sassanide Artaxerxes in 226 occasioned a war on the Euphrates. The new monarch, who restored to the Persian mountaineers the domination which the Parthians had wrested from them, declared himself of the ancient royal race, and claimed all the provinces which Darius had formerly possessed. Alexander replied by attacking the Persians. The expedition was fully successful. The news that the Germans had invaded Gaul and Illyricum hastened his return. He hurried to the Rhine and was there killed in a sedition.

Six Emperors in Nine Years (235-244).—The soldiers proclaimed Maximinus, a Thracian Goth, who in his youth had been a shepherd. He was a giant, eight feet tall. He is said to have eaten daily thirty pounds of meat and to

have drunk an amphora of wine. This barbarian, who did not dare even once to come to Rome, treated the empire like a conquered country, pillaging cities and temples alike. Mankind soon tired of him. Despite their entreaties, the proconsul of Africa, Gordianus I, and his son, Gordianus II, who boasted their descent from the Gracchi and Trajan, were proclaimed emperors. Recognized by the senate but overthrown, the senate afterwards itself proclaimed Pupienus and Balbinus. The people demanded that a son of the younger Gordianus should be declared emperor. As for Maximinus, he and his son were assassinated before Aquileia which he was besieging, and a little later the senate's two emperors were massacred in their palaces. Then the prætorians proclaimed Gordianus III. He was only thirteen years of age. Misiæus, his tutor and father-in-law, governed wisely in his name, but the death of the clever counsellor enabled the Arab Philip to become prefect of the prætorian guard. He slew the emperor and took his place.

During the reign of Gordianus the Franks are mentioned for the first time. They were a confederation of Germanic tribes on the lower Rhine, like that of the Alemanni on the upper Rhine. The latter constantly threatened Rætia and even Gaul itself, whose northern provinces the former invaded. At the other extremity of Germany, the Goths had gradually descended from Scandinavia upon the lower Danube and the Black Sea. They were for the time being the empire's most dangerous neighbors.

Philip (244-249). Decius (249-251). The Thirty Tyrants (251-268).—At the end of five years the soldiers decided that Philip had reigned long enough and revolts broke out everywhere. Meanwhile the Goths crossed the Danube, and the senator Decius, whom he sent against them, was proclaimed by the troops. A battle was fought near Verona and Philip was killed. The quiet enjoyed by the Church during Philip's reign has led to the erroneous belief that he was a Christian. Decius on the contrary persecuted it cruelly. However he reigned only two years and perished in a great battle with the Goths in Moesia (251).

The army acknowledged Galbus, one of its generals, who promised the barbarians an annual tribute. This had the effect of inducing them to return. Æmilianus, who routed them, assumed the purple. Both were killed by their soldiers (253). Valerian, saluted as emperor, named his son

Gallienus as Cæsar and endeavored to arrest the imminent dissolution of the empire. In 258 he recaptured from the Parthians the great city of Antioch and penetrated into Mesopotamia; but near Edessa he was vanquished and made prisoner by King Sapor (260), who retained him in captivity exposed to insults until he died. Sapor had re-entered Syria. He was forced back across the Euphrates by the prætorian prefect Balista and the Arab chief Odenath. The latter grew powerful enough to secure recognition as Augustus by Gallienus (264). Palmyra his capital, situated in an oasis at three days' distance from the Euphrates, had become rich and powerful through its immense commerce. Imposing ruins still testify to its past greatness.

After the captivity of his father Gallienus ruled alone for eight years. His reign was one ceaseless struggle against the usurpers, barbarians and calamities of all sorts that descended upon the empire. This period is called that of the Thirty Tyrants. There were in reality only nineteen or twenty, all of whom died violent deaths like Saturnus, who said to his soldiers, "Comrades, you are losing a good general and making a wretched emperor," and who was slain because of his severity. Odenath, a valiant prince, delivered the East from the Persians and the Goths, who had disembarked in Asia Minor, but was himself assassinated in 267 by his nephew. Zenobia, his wife, slew the murderer and succeeded to her husband's power. Gaul was independent for fourteen years under five Gallic emperors. To internal disorder had been added barbarian invasions. The Goths and the Heruli had ravaged Greece and Asia Minor. One Goth wished to burn the library at Athens, but another prevented him. "Leave to our enemies," said he, "these books which deprive them of the love of arms." The Athenians however, led by the historian Dexippus, had the honor of defeating these brigands.

Claudius (268). Aurelian (270). Tacitus (275). Probus (275). Carus (282).—Gallienus, who alone appeared legitimate among all these usurpers, was mortally wounded by traitors while besieging one of his competitors in Milan. As he expired, he chose for his successor a Dalmatian, Claudius, who was then the most renowned general of the empire. Claudius had only the time for a hurried march to Macedon, where he defeated 300,000 Goths near Naissus, and there died of the pest. Aurelian took his place (270). He had

first to check an invasion of the Alemanni, who penetrated through Rætia as far as Placentia where they destroyed a Roman army and thence as far as the shores of the Adriatic. Rome was terror-stricken. The senate consulted the Sibylline books and in obedience to their responses sacrificed human victims. A victory gained on the banks of Metaurus delivered Italy; but the danger which Rome had incurred determined the emperor to surround it with a strong wall. He was less fortunate against the Goths. A treaty abandoned to them Dacia, whose inhabitants he transported into Mœsia. The Danube again became the boundary of the empire.

Tranquillity reestablished on that frontier, he marched to the East (273) to encounter Zenobia, queen of Palmyra. This princess, celebrated for her courage and her rare intelligence, dreamed of forming a vast Oriental empire. He wrested from her Syria, Egypt and a part of Asia Minor, defeated her near Antioch and Emesa and besieged her in Palmyra, her capital, where she had taken refuge. When the resources of the city were exhausted, Zenobia fled on a dromedary toward the Euphrates but was captured and taken to Aurelian. Her principal minister, the sophist Longinus, whose treatise on the *Sublime* we still possess, was suspected of being the author of an offensive letter sent by Zenobia to Aurelian and was put to death. The emperor reserved the queen to adorn his triumph and afterward assigned her a splendid villa at Tibur. In the West, Tetricus, who had usurped Gaul, Spain and Britain, himself betrayed his army and passed over to the side of Aurelian, who appointed him governor of Lucania.

Delivered from foreign troubles Aurelian tried to restore order in the administration and discipline in the army. Desirous of occupying the restless minds of the legions he was preparing an expedition against the Persians, when his secretary, accused of extortion and afraid of punishment, had him assassinated (275). The soldiers, ashamed of having permitted the murder of their glorious chieftain, forced the senate to choose an emperor. It appointed the aged Tacitus, who died after six months.

The soldiers then proclaimed Probus, who immediately hastened to Gaul, which had been invaded by the Alemanni. He recaptured sixty towns, followed the enemy across the Rhine and pursued them beyond the Neckar. The Germans

delivered to him 16,000 of their young warriors, whom he enrolled, though dispersing them among his troops. In Illyricum he routed the Sarmatæ; in Thrace the Getæ; in Asia Minor the brigands of Isauria and Pamphylia; in Egypt the Blemyes, who had seized Coptos. Narses, king of Persia, alarmed by these successes, sued for peace. On his return through Thrace Probus established on the lands of the empire 100,000 Bastarnæ, just as he had already established Germans in Britain and Franks on the shores of the Pontus Euxinus. He was preparing to march against the Persians when the hard labor which he imposed upon his soldiers, compelling them to plant vineyards and drain marshes, caused a revolt in which he perished (282). The next day the soldiers mourned him. They chose the prefect of the guards, Carus, who bestowed the title of Cæsar on his two sons, Carinus and Numerianus. The elder received the government of the West. The younger after a victory over the Goths and Sarmatæ followed his father to the East. Carus captured Seleucia and Ctesiphon but died suddenly, and Numerianus hastened to treat with the Persians. As he was leading the legions back to the Bosphorus, he was killed by his father-in-law Arrius Aper (284). Five days later under the walls of Chalcedon the soldiers proclaimed the Dalmatian Diocletian, who slew Aper with his own hand before the eyes of the whole army. Carinus endeavored to overthrow the new emperor, but he was slain in battle near Margus in Mœsia (285).

