

The ancient political writers, in speaking on the best form of a political establishment, held this as a great *desideratum*, that a government should possess within itself a power of periodical reformation; a capacity of reforming from time to time all abuses; of checking every overgrowth of power in any one branch of the body politic; and, at short intervals of time, winding up, as it were, the springs of the machine, and bringing the constitution back to its first principles. To the want of this power of periodical reformation in the ancient constitutions, which was ineffectually endeavored to be supplied by such contrivances as the *ostracism* and *petalism*, we may in a great measure attribute their decline and extinction; for in these governments, when the balance was once destroyed by an increase of power in any one branch, the evil grew worse from day to day, and at length, was utterly irremediable, unless by a revolution or entire change of the political system. Happily for us Britons, that which was a desideratum in the ancient governments is with us realized; that power of reforming all abuses, and even of making alterations and amendments as time and circumstances require, which is perfectly agreeable to the spirit of our constitution, has given us an unspeakable advantage, both over all the states of antiquity, and over every other government among the moderns. But let us not abuse this advantage, or convert what is a wholesome remedy into a poison. There are seasons when political reforms are safe, expedient, and desirable; there are others when none but the most rash empiric would prescribe their application. If the minds of a people are violently agitated by political enthusiasm, kindled by the example of other nations actually in a state of revolution,—if that class of the people who derive their subsistence from bodily labor and industry are artfully rendered discontented with their situation, inflamed by pictures of imaginary grievances, and stimulated by delusive representations of immunities to be acquired, and blessings to be obtained, by new political systems, in which they themselves are to be legislators and governors,—if there should be a time when the common people are taught to believe that a subordination of ranks and conditions is contrary to the laws of God and nature, and that the inequality they perceive in the possessions of the rich and poor is a proof of the diseased state of the body politic,—if such should be the delusions of the community, which the traitorous designs of others aim at rendering general; in such a crisis it cannot be the part of true patriotism to attempt the reform or amendment even of confessed imperfections. The hazard of the experiment at such a time is apparent to all rational and reflecting men. It is *then* we feel it our *duty* to resist *all* attempts at innovation—to cherish with gratitude the blessings we enjoy, and quietly await a more favorable opportunity of gently and easily removing our small imperfections—trivial, indeed, when balanced against that high measure of political happiness of which the community at large is possessed.

BOOK THE FIFTH.

CHAPTER I.

Fate of the Roman Republic decided by the Battle of Actium—Reign of Augustus—Birth of our Saviour JESUS CHRIST—Tiberius—Crucifixion of our Saviour—Caligula—Claudius—Nero—Galba—Otho—Vitellius—Vespasian—Titus—Domitian—Nerva—Trajan—Adrian.

THE battle of Actium decided, as we have above seen, the fate of the Roman republic; and Octavius, now hailed by the splendid title of Augustus, was master of the Roman empire. We have seen this singular person raise himself to the highest summit of power, without a tincture of those manly and heroic virtues which generally distinguish the authors of important revolutions. Those fortunate circumstances which concurred to promote his elevation; the adoption by Julius Cæsar, the weakness of Lepidus, the infatuation of Mark Antony, the treachery of Cleopatra, and, perhaps, more than all, his own insinuating flattery and duplicity of conduct—were shortly hinted at as the great instruments in the good fortune of Augustus.

Possessing that sagacity which enabled him to discern distinctly what species of character would please the people, he had, in addition to this, all that versatility of genius which enabled him to assume it; and so successfully did he follow out this idea, that to those unacquainted with the former conduct of the man, nothing was now discernible but the qualities which were indicative of goodness, and virtue, and munificence. The fate of Cæsar warned him of the insecurity of an usurped dominion; and we shall see him, whilst he studiously imitated the clemency of his great predecessor, affect a much greater degree of respect for the pretended rights of that degraded people whom he ruled at the same time with the most absolute authority. He had not yet returned from Egypt when, at Rome, they had already decreed him every honor both human and divine. The title of Imperator was conferred on him for life. His colleague, Sextus Apuleius, along with the whole senate, took a solemn oath to obey the emperor's decrees; and it was determined that he should hold the consulate so long as he

esteemed it necessary for the interests of the people. Such was the contemptible servility of all ranks of the state, that temples were erected to his honor, and public worship and sacrifice performed at the altars of the "divine Augustus." He, however, with becoming modesty, requested that these honors might be paid to him in the provinces alone, as *at Rome* he should never regard himself but as a private citizen invested with the superintendence of the rights and liberties of the republic. The state being now in profound peace, the temple of Janus, which had remained open since the beginning of the second Punic war—a period of 188 years—was shut,—an event which occasioned the most universal joy. This single circumstance contributed much to abolish the memory of all those cruelties, proscriptions, and complicated horrors, which had accompanied the triumvirate and the civil wars; and the "infatuated Romans now believed themselves a free people, since they had no longer to fight for their liberty."*

It was the policy of Augustus to keep up this favorable delusion, by extraordinary marks of indulgence and munificence. He gratified the people by continually amusing them with their favorite games and spectacles; he affected an extreme regard for all the ancient popular customs; he pretended the utmost deference for the senate; he re-established the Comitia, which the internal commotions of the government had prevented from being regularly held; he flattered the people with the ancient right of electing their own magistrates; if he presented candidates, it was only to give a simple recommendation, under reservation that they should be judged worthy by the people, and the people, on their part, could not but regard as the most certain symptom of desert, the recommendation of so gracious a prince. It was in this manner that Augustus, by the retention of all those empty but ancient appendages of liberty, concealed the form of that arbitrary monarchy which he determined to maintain; and that he thus, with the most hypocritical and specious generosity, contrived, with the machinery of freedom, to accomplish all the purposes of despotism.

After having established an appearance of order in the several departments of the state, Augustus, to complete the farce, affected a wish to abdicate his authority, and return to the rank of a private citizen; but this was a piece of gross affectation. He consulted Mæcenas, however, and Marcus Agrippa, whether he ought to follow his inclination. Mæcenas, with the most honest, though certainly not the wisest policy, exhorted him to put his design in execution; but Agrippa, more of a courtier, and perhaps having more discernment into the real character of Augustus, or dreading

* Condillac.

the reputation of those cruel and turbulent scenes which had preceded his exaltation, assured him that the public happiness depended entirely on his continuing to hold the reins of government; and this advice was too consonant to the actual views of Augustus not to be readily embraced.

This seeming moderation, however, increased the popularity of Augustus, and even paved the way for an extension of his power. The censorship had, for many years, fallen into disuse. Under the pretence of effecting a reformation of various abuses in the several orders of the community, Augustus requested that he might be invested with censorial powers; and having obtained this office, he introduced many improvements in the different departments of the government, which, although salutary in themselves, contributed much to the increase of his own authority. With this daily augmentation of power, he was not without continual alarms, for his personal safety. He was naturally timid, and the fate of Cæsar was ever before him. For a considerable time, he never went to the senate-house without a suit of armor under his robe; he carried a dagger in his girdle; and was always surrounded by ten of the bravest of the senators, on whose attachment he could thoroughly depend. It was much to the credit of Augustus that he reposed an unlimited confidence in Mæcenas—a most able minister, and one who, with the firmest attachment to his sovereign, appears to have always had at heart the interest and happiness of the people. It was by his excellent counsels that Augustus was taught to assume those virtues to which his nature was a stranger; it was to the patronage of Mæcenas that literature and the fine arts owed much of their encouragement and consequent progress; it was by his instructions, by the counsels he inculcated, that the base and inhuman Octavius was transformed into the affable and humane Augustus.

In the seventh year of his consulate, Augustus again pretended a desire to abdicate, and he actually informed the senate that he had resigned all authority; but he was now secure of the consequences of this avowal. From those mercenary voices which had, no doubt, been behind the scenes, well trained to this hypocritical farce, there was now one universal cry of supplication, entreating him not to abandon that republic which he had preserved from destruction, and whose existence depended on his paternal care. "Since it must be so," said he, "I accept the empire for ten years, unless the public peace and tranquillity shall permit me before that time to seek that ease and retirement which I so passionately desire." He would not even consent to take the burden of the whole empire, but entreated that the senate and people should govern a part of the provinces. From the distribution which followed, we learn the extent of the Roman empire at this time. Augustus reserved for his own government Italy, the two Gauls, Spain, Germany, Syria, Phœnicia, Cyprus, and Egypt. To the senate and people were allotted *Africa Proper*, Numidia, Lybia, Bithy-

nia, Pontus, Greece, Illyria, Macedonia, Dalmatia, and the Islands of Crete, Sicily, and Sardinia. The provinces of which Augustus retained the government *direct* were those where *the legions* were principally stationed!

The title of Consul, which had been of assistance at first in disguising his power, was now judged unnecessary by Augustus; and the annual ceremony of the renewal of this dignity perhaps recalled too strongly to the minds of the people the irrevocable tenure by which he held it. He resigned it, therefore, in the eleventh year of his consulate; and, as a compensation for this exercise of moderation, the people entreated him to accept of the office of Perpetual Tribune. By this refined policy, every increase of power seemed, so far from any encroachment upon his part, to be forced upon him by the anxious entreaty of the people. In virtue of this last office, he became in all causes, civil as well as criminal, the supreme judge. Formerly in the republic there had never been recognised any right of appeal from any of the courts to the tribunes; but the people, who had always till now considered themselves as possessing the supereminent right of appeal, now voluntarily conferred it upon their perpetual tribune, as their chief magistrate and virtual representative.

Marcellus, the nephew of Augustus, to whom he had given his daughter in marriage, and whom he destined for his successor—a personage of great promise—died at this time, to the unspeakable regret of the Roman people, in the very flower of his youth. He had just completed his twentieth year, and in his talents and disposition had begun to show every indication of a great and a generous prince. He has been immortalized by Virgil in that exquisite eulogium, with which all are acquainted, in the sixth book of his *Æneid*.

Marcus Agrippa was the man who seemed to stand next to this amiable youth in the affection of the emperor. Agrippa had married the niece of Augustus; but on the death of Marcellus, he caused him to divorce her, and in return gave him his daughter, the widow of Marcellus, in marriage. This lady was the infamous Julia, who afterwards became so openly scandalous in her amours, that her father, after informing the senate of his reasons, condemned her to banishment.

Notwithstanding the absolute authority now possessed by Augustus, it was still the policy of this monarch to retain all the exterior forms of a republic. The elections of magistrates were punctually held in the *Comitia*. Consuls were, as usual, annually chosen; and the republic retained its *ædiles*, its *tribunes*, its *quæstors*, and *prætors*. In the government of Augustus, and in the gradual increase of his authority, the prince, to all appearance derives his power from the people. After a little, we shall observe the emperor affecting to conceal this truth; and in the sequel, it will be totally forgotten.

While Augustus had thus, step by step, arrived at the summit of power, his son-in-law Agrippa had entirely brought under subjection the Spanish peninsula, where, for nearly two centuries, the Romans had been compelled to a continual struggle. Augustus, to secure his own authority, by firmly attaching to himself so able a general, associated him with himself in the office of censor. The two censors immediately applied themselves with great vigor to the reformation of abuses. Augustus, perhaps not hypocritically, affected the highest regard to the purity of public morals, although in his own private life he is known to have been profligate and vicious.

The tenth year, the period which he had appointed for laying down his authority, had now arrived. He accordingly did so, and, at the earnest entreaty of the people, again resumed it; and so fond does he appear to have been of this solemn farce, that five times in the course of his government he amused the nation with this empty pageantry of their pretended power. The empire was now again threatened with war, and Augustus set out for Gaul, into which the Germans had begun now to make those irruptions, which proved afterwards so fatal to the provinces. Drusus, in the meantime, defeated the *Rhætians*, a people inhabiting part of the modern Switzerland; and Agrippa restored peace to Asia. In marking the successive steps of despotism, it is not unnecessary to mention that this general was the first who refused the honor of a triumph, which gave rise to this privilege belonging ever afterwards only to the emperors; and that he omitted also, for the first time, that customary form of acquainting the senate with the detail of his military operations, corresponding with Augustus alone. In these matters, of course, his example became henceforth the rule.

At this time died Marcus Agrippa, and his widow Julia now took her third husband, Tiberius, who became thus by a double tie the son-in-law of Augustus, for the emperor had likewise married his mother Livia. Augustus was then at war with the *Pannonians*, *Dacians*, and *Dalmatians*. Tiberius and his brother Drusus commanded the armies against those barbarous tribes with great success, but, to the deep regret of the Romans, their particular favorite Drusus died in Germany, leaving three children, Germanicus, Claudius (afterwards emperor,) and Julia, married to Caius Cæsar. Caius was the son of Agrippa by Julia, whom Augustus had adopted, along with his brother Lucius. These two princes died soon after, poisoned as it was supposed by Livia, the wife of Augustus, to make way for the succession of her son Tiberius. This dark and ambitious man now bent all his powers to gain the confidence of Augustus, who, upon his return from a successful campaign against the Germans, not only allowed him the honor of a triumph, but associated him with himself in the government of the empire. At the request of Augustus also, the people, accustomed

now to unlimited compliance, conferred upon Tiberius the government of the provinces and the supreme command of the armies.

On the ground of his advanced age, the emperor now found an opportunity of shaking off all that dependence upon the senate and people to which his policy had hitherto confined him. He no longer came regularly to the senate, but formed a sort of privy council, consisting of twenty senators, together with the consuls of the year, and the *consules designati*; and it was determined in the senate, that the resolutions of this assembly should have the same authority as the *senatus consulta*. Augustus did not long survive this his last and boldest innovation. He died soon after at Nola, in Campania, in the seventy-sixth year of his age, after having, in conjunction with Mark Antony, ruled the Roman republic for nearly twelve, and governed alone as emperor for forty-four years.

In treating of the Roman literature, we observed that high degree of advancement to which it attained under the reign of Augustus; and we may attribute no small part of that lustre which has been thrown upon his administration, to the splendid coloring bestowed on his character by the illustrious poets who adorned his court, and repaid his favors by their incense and adulation.

“ Vixere fortes ante Agamemnona
Multi, sed omnes illacrymabiles
Urgentur ignotique longa
Nocte, carent quia vate sacro.”

Augustus, by his testament, had named Tiberius his heir, together with his mother Livia, and substituted to them Drusus, the son of Tiberius, and Germanicus. Tiberius was no favorite with the body of the people. They knew him to be vicious and debauched, and of a severe and cruel disposition; yet to so low a pitch of degradation had they now fallen, that the very dread of these vices in his character operated so strongly on their servile minds as to secure his succession to the empire without a whisper of opposition. An embassy of the senators was deputed to offer him the reins of government while he was on his return from Illyria. He received them with much affected humility; talked of the burden of so extensive an empire and his own limited ability; pretended uncommon unwillingness to undertake so exalted an office; and, at length, after the usual ceremony of tears and supplication on the part of the senate, was at last prevailed to yield to their entreaties.

Notwithstanding these promising symptoms, this was all the mockery of moderation with which Tiberius ever condescended to flatter the prejudices of the senate or the people; for it soon after appeared that he esteemed the power enjoyed by his predecessor as far too little for his ambition. It was not sufficient for him that the substance of the republic was now gone for ever; the very appearance of it, and all those forms which recalled it to his

recollection, were judged necessary to be abolished. Augustus had received from the people the power of legislation, but he left them in return the right of electing their own magistrates, and all the privileges of the Comitia. Tiberius at once abolished all these formalities. The people were no longer assembled, yet the emperor did not choose to break entirely with the senate. He frequently affected to consult them, or at least to communicate to them his resolutions, and flattered them still with the possession of a shadow of authority.

The uncertainty of the laws with regard to treason gave at last to Tiberius an opportunity of discovering his natural disposition. Sylla had declared the authors of libels guilty of treason. This law had fallen into disuse under Julius Cæsar, who treated such offences with their merited contempt. Augustus had revived the law; Tiberius, with his usual dissimulation, neither renewed it nor abrogated it. The prætor having asked if he should take cognizance of such offences, the emperor vouchsafed him no other answer than that he should observe the laws; an answer which sufficiently informed the people what they had to expect, whilst Tiberius persuaded himself that he thus avoided all imputation of adopting sanguinary measures.

Meantime his nephew, Germanicus, who was acquiring great glory by his military exploits in Germany, was recalled by Tiberius, who had become jealous of his popularity with the army. The emperor sent him to the oriental provinces on the pretence of quelling some insurrections, and a short time after he died—as was suspected of poison administered to him by command of Tiberius. Every vicious prince has his favorite, the minister of his pleasure, and the obsequious instrument of his criminal or tyrannical purposes. Ælius Sejanus was prefect of the prætorian bands, who were the emperor's guards—a body of men amounting then to ten thousand of the flower of the troops, but who, increasing in number and in political power, became at last the sovereign disposers of the empire. Sejanus, their prefect, acquired at length so complete an ascendancy over the mind of Tiberius, that he overcame the natural reserve and suspicion of his temper, and became the confidant of his most secret thoughts. It was not to be wondered at that this minion should entertain the highest views of ambition. He conceived no less a design than to exterminate the whole family of the Cæsars, and his first step was the poisoning of Drusus, the son of Tiberius, which he contrived to execute so secretly that he escaped all suspicion both of the emperor and of the people. His next design was to remove Agrippina, the widow of Germanicus, with her two sons, Nero and the younger Drusus. Sejanus accordingly represented Agrippina to Tiberius as a woman of unlimited ambition, and who secretly fomented a party of malecontents in the state as assistants to her own aggrandizement and that of her sons. To this accusation, the natural pride and haugh-

ness of the temper of Agrippina gave some shadow of color, and she and Nero, her eldest son, were condemned to banishment, whilst the younger Drusus, was confined to prison.

Every day now produced some new information, some pretended charge of treason brought by Sejanus and his infamous minions against the most eminent persons of the court; and the idea that these informations were pleasing to the dark and vindictive mind of the emperor, began to multiply them exceedingly. The constant executions for treason, by which Sejanus was daily clearing the way for the accomplishment of his own designs, produced at length such an effect on the gloomy temper of Tiberius, that he believed his life to be in continual danger. At the instigation of Sejanus, he quitted Rome and retired to the Isle of Capreae, in the Bay of Naples, carrying with him a few of the senators, and some Greek literati, in whose conversation he professed to find entertainment. It is said that in this retreat the old tyrant gave himself up to excesses in debauchery which exceed all credibility. It is certain, however, that the severity of his former manner of life was very opposite to such licentiousness of character, and we may naturally presume that the hatred of his subjects, and the concealment which he probably chose from the consideration of personal safety, have given occasion to much aspersion, or at least to great exaggerations on the subject.

Sejanus, meanwhile, had acquired an absolute authority in Rome, and was sovereign in every thing but the name. It was but a small step, to a villain of his complexion, to aim likewise at that last acquisition. He formed, therefore, a design, to assassinate Tiberius;—but the conspiracy was discovered. Such, however, was the influence of Sejanus, that the emperor was obliged to use art and address to bring him to punishment. He at first loaded him with caresses, and caused him to be nominated to the consulate. He then took occasion privately to sound the minds of the people, and hinted some grounds of dissatisfaction with his conduct, which instantly he perceived to cool the zeal of his former flatterers and pretended friends. Convinced now of the ground on which he stood, and certain that this dreaded popularity of Sejanus was hollow, and the effect of power alone, whilst he was really detested by all ranks in the state, Tiberius deemed it time to throw off the mask. He sent, therefore, an officer to deprive him of the command of the prætorian guards; and accusing him at the same time of treason by a letter to the senate, Sejanus was instantly arrested, condemned to death by acclamation, torn to pieces, and thrown into the Tiber. Tiberius now became more negligent than ever of the cares of government, and confusion prevailed in every department of the state. The magistracies were unsupplied, the distant provinces were without governors, and the Roman name became contemptible. The only exertions of the imperial power were manifested in public executions, confiscations, and the most complicated scenes of cruelty and rapine. At length the empire was

delivered from this odious tyrant, who falling sick at Misenum, was strangled in his bed by Macro, the new prefect, who had succeeded Sejanus in the command of the prætorian cohorts. He was put to death in the 78th year of his age, and the 23rd of his reign.

One great event distinguished the reign of Tiberius. In the 18th year of that reign, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the divine author of our religion, suffered death upon the cross, a sacrifice and propitiation for the sins of mankind. It is said that soon after his death, Pilate, the Jewish governor, wrote to Tiberius an account of his passion, resurrection, and miracles, upon which the emperor made a report of the whole to the senate, desiring that Jesus might be acknowledged a god by the Romans, but that the senate, displeased that the proposal had not come from themselves, refused the emperor's request. This last circumstance utterly discredits the story, for the Roman senate dared not refuse the request of Tiberius. The progress of the Christian religion, from its first institution till the utter extinction of Paganism in the Roman empire, will form the future subject of a connected chapter.

By his testament, the emperor had nominated as his successor Caligula, the son of Germanicus, and his grandson by adoption, together with Tiberius, the son of Drusus, and his grandson by blood. Caligula was, on his father's account, the favorite of the people, and more especially of the soldiers, amongst whom he had been educated; and the senate, to gratify the people, chose to set aside the nomination in favor of Tiberius, and to confer the sovereignty on Caligula alone. His accession to the empire, gave, therefore, universal satisfaction; and, for a time, he condescended to maintain this favorable opinion by a few acts of clemency and moderation. He removed the informers who swarmed through Rome, and had been the bane of the preceding reign. He restored for a while the privileges of the Comitia, and he gratified the people still more by their favorite exhibition of public games and shows. But this dawn of sunshine soon gave place to a day of gloom and horror. Caligula, weary of dissimulation, threw off the mask at once. Macro, the murderer of his predecessor, was too dangerous a man to continue long in that favor with Caligula in which this piece of service had placed him—he was accordingly murdered. The young Tiberius, although then no favorite of the people, might become so, when they discovered the real temper of the rival they had preferred to him. He was, therefore, speedily cut off. Caligula had abolished informations on account of treason, but he did so only to facilitate the rapidity of execution, and he now, therefore, required not the formality of an information. He put to death, without assigning even a pretence, whatever person he took a prejudice against. It is inconceivable to what excess this monster proceeded. His whole reign, with the exception of a few months at its commencement, was one