

had multiplied so exceedingly during the preceding reigns. His manners were simple, but his administration evinced both vigor and discernment. It was his custom every summer, when he could procure a respite from the busy scenes of the state, to retire to a small country house he had at Reti, where his mother lived, where he had been himself born, and which he took a pleasure to preserve in the same humble appearance in which he had known it in the days of his infancy. Under this reign, the senate, had any ancient virtue remained in that body or in Rome, might have recovered its former lustre. Vespasian communicated all affairs to that body. He also, in conjunction with his son Titus, applied himself to complete the number of the senators, as well as that of the Roman knights, which body had been diminished, and almost exterminated, by the tyranny of his predecessors.

The avarice of Vespasian is the only vice which sullies his imperial character. He renewed many of the most odious of the taxes of Galba, and added some others equally grievous; and yet the low state of the public funds, and the laudable purposes to which he uniformly applied the public money, may perhaps form some apology for this single vice. Under this reign was terminated the war with the Jews. They had been brought under the Roman yoke by Pompey, who had taken Jerusalem; under Augustus they were for some time governed by Herod as viceroy, but the tyranny of his son Archelaus provoked Augustus to banish him, and to reduce Judæa into the ordinary state of a Roman province. The stubborn character of that people was ill fitted for obedience to governors whose religion they held in abhorrence. They were continually rebelling on the slightest occasion. Nero had sent Vespasian to reduce them into order, and he had completed the subjugation of the whole country except the capital, when he was summoned to the cares of empire. He left the charge of the war to his son Titus, who concluded it by the taking of Jerusalem. That ill-fated city, whose ruin,—doomed by the Almighty, and predicted by prophets,—was accomplished rather by the intemperate zeal and inflexible obstinacy of its inhabitants than by the arms of its enemies, was carried by storm, after every means had been in vain tried by the humane Titus to persuade the Jews to surrender. The temple was burnt to ashes, and the city buried in ruins.

Vespasian now shut the temple of Janus, and associated his son Titus with himself in power. He conferred upon him the command of the prætorian guards, and employed him as his counsellor and first minister. At the age of sixty-nine he began to feel the approaches of his decay, and falling sick, retired to his little country-seat at Reti, where, although sensible that his death was near, he continued still to occupy himself uninterruptedly with the cares of government. An emperor, he said, ought to die standing, and thus in truth died Vespasian, after a prosperous and able reign of nine years and eleven months.

His son Titus had early evinced the most favorable dispositions. The abilities of his mind were equal to his personal accomplishments, and the qualities of his heart were inferior to neither. He seemed born to form the happiness of his people. He possessed heroism sufficient to have revived the ancient splendor of the Romans, and that tempered with a humanity and moderation which are but too rarely its attendants. Such was certainly his genuine character; for those who mention a few follies of his youth, as the indications of a vicious disposition, should remember what were the manners of the courts of Claudius and Nero in which he received his education. The intemperate follies of youth were soon abandoned for the care of his people, whose happiness became, from the moment of accession, his only study. He removed from all employments such as were of a dubious or dishonorable character. He continued in office every man of virtue whom his father had employed. Yet, with the strictness of moral feeling where it might conduce to the welfare of his people, his temper was far from being rigid. He knew the taste of the nation for their favorite amusements, and the amphitheatre which he built was of magnificence suitable to the grandeur of the empire.

In the first year of the reign of Titus, happened that most remarkable eruption of Mount Vesuvius which overwhelmed the cities of Herculaneum and Pompeii, and in which the elder Pliny lost his life, from an earnest curiosity to be a near witness of that striking spectacle. He had determined to embellish his Natural History with a description of that most interesting phenomenon, and for this purpose rushed eagerly into that situation of danger from which others were as eagerly attempting to escape. He was there suffocated by a cloud of sulphureous vapor. His nephew, the younger Pliny, has given a vivid description of this remarkable scene, in a letter to Tacitus the historian, (lib. vi. epist. 16.) Of the character of his uncle, he says, with justice, "Equidem beatos puto quibus deorum munere datum est aut facere scribenda, aut scribere legenda. Beatissimos vero quibus utrumque; horum in numero avunculus meus."* The desolation of Campania, occasioned by this terrible eruption of Vesuvius, was remedied to the utmost by the beneficence of Titus, who set apart large funds for the relief of the sufferers. In order to judge of their losses, he went himself to Campania, and by a kind of fatality, whilst absent on this benevolent expedition, a fire, which broke out in the city, desolated a great part of Rome. The losses occasioned to his subjects, by these reiterated calamities, he repaired at his own charges, not from the public money, which is generally the treasury

* "I esteem those the truly happy of mankind to whom the gods have allotted either to do things worthy of being written, or to write things worthy of being read. The happiest are they who have done both; and among those was my relative."

of the prince's bounties, but from the sale of the superfluous ornaments and riches of his palaces. Thus this virtuous prince occupied himself by every means which generosity or benevolence could dictate in diffusing happiness amongst all classes of his subjects, when, to their unspeakable regret, he was cut off in the third year of his reign. He died at the age of forty, leaving behind him that most merited and exalted epithet, *Deliciae humani generis*;—*the delight of the human race*.

Titus was suspected to have been poisoned by his brother Domitian, a character in every respect the reverse of his. The monster,—for such his life declared him,—contrived, like some of his unworthy predecessors, for a while to conceal his vices. He affected to show a moderation and a love of justice, which gave promise of a happy reign; but his natural disposition soon unveiled itself. An insurrection, which happened at that time in Germany, gave him an opportunity of satiating himself with blood. The rebellion itself was speedily quelled, but its consequences were long deplored in the innumerable murders of the most respected among the citizens, for which the bare suspicion of having been concerned in the rebellion afforded always a sufficient pretext.

Informers, that despicable brood, the scourge of men of worth, began again to swarm throughout the country; slaves were bribed to give evidence against their masters; pretenders to astrology were appointed to draw the horoscopes of the principal citizens, the emperor ordering those to be put to death to whom fortune promised any thing great or successful.

Could the people have slept in quiet under the constant dread of a sentence of death, they might have been abundantly gratified in their darling amusements of games and shows. In these the new emperor squandered prodigious sums; but the expenses were in truth furnished by the unhappy citizens, whom he loaded with the most exorbitant taxes. It was the lot of Domitian, as of other tyrants, to be haunted by the continual dread of assassination. Fortunately for the world, his fears were at last realized; a conspiracy was formed in the heart of his palace, the empress, as is said, conducting the plot, and he was assassinated after a cruel and inglorious reign of fifteen years. Under this reign flourished Martial the epigramist, from whose venal praises if we were to judge of the character of Domitian, we should believe him one of the best and greatest princes.

In the time of Domitian the empire was engaged in a variety of wars; the only one of these which ended honorably for the Romans was that carried on in Britain. A detail of its operations belongs more properly to the sketch which we shall have to give of the earliest periods of the history of our own country. The conspirators who had put to death Domitian raised Cocceius Nerva to the throne. He was born at Narni, in Umbria, of a Cretan family, and was the first emperor who was not a Roman. He

was, when elected, approaching to the age of seventy—a man, certainly, of worth and virtue, but too weak for the burden of government. His pliant disposition permitted all excesses. Under Domitian every thing was construed into a crime; under the reign of Nerva nothing. The troops who were fond of Domitian's memory, because he had been lavish of his bounties, demanded that his murderers should be punished. Nerva had not the resolution to refuse, and they put to death, under his eyes, those very persons who had given him the empire. Conscious of his own weakness, he, in order to secure himself upon the throne, adopted the virtuous Trajan, who was then carrying on war in Pannonia, and had never entertained any views of such exaltation. The empire was governed for some months by Trajan, till the death of Nerva, which happened soon after. He had reigned only sixteen months.

Trajan was in every respect worthy of the throne, for he possessed all those peculiar talents and those higher virtues which ought to adorn a sovereign. He was born of a respectable though not an ancient family:—his father had been consul. He perfectly understood the art of war, and he soon re-established, upon his succeeding to the empire, the ancient military discipline, which, of late, had been nearly forgotten. He marched always on foot, at the head of his troops; underwent every fatigue in common with them; and shared the same simple fare. Under such a general, it is no wonder the Roman arms should have regained their ancient splendor. His first war was against the Dacians, to whom Domitian had pusillanimously subjected the empire to pay an annual tribute. Trajan shook off this shameful imposition, and in a few campaigns entirely subdued that warlike nation. A lasting monument of his victories in the Dacian war still remains in that magnificent column at Rome which bears the name of Trajan, and which is decorated with his exploits in beautiful sculpture.

Chosroes, king of the Parthians, had disposed of the crown of Armenia. Trajan, considering this as an invasion of the rights of the Roman empire, marched against him, subdued his whole territories, took his capital of Ctesiphon, and brought under submission Mesopotamia, Syria, and Arabia Felix. This love of conquest he, however, carried too far; and it was the more blamable in a prince who had every requisite for rendering his people happy under the blessings of peace. It is said that he regretted he was not so young as Alexander, that he might have vied with him in the extent of his conquests. He should have rather remembered, that the empire was already too large, and felt the difficulty of defending its extensive frontier. Yet, influenced as he was by this ruling passion, his attention to the cares of government, and his management of all matters connected with the state, were truly admirable. It was customary for the emperor to be named consul the year following his accession. Trajan refused it, as he was

then at a distance in the provinces. On his return, he went through all the forms of the ancient procedure for the election of magistrates, with the utmost scrupulousness. These had long been discontinued by his predecessors. He called the comitia, presented himself as a candidate, and at his election, besides the customary oaths, he invoked the powers of heaven to strengthen him in the performance of his duty.

He was liberal in his donations to the people, but they were not, like those of other emperors, the mean bribes of a despot; they were the largesses of a beneficent prince, for the support of the wretched and indigent. The children of the poor were educated at his expense, and it was computed that two millions of destitute persons were maintained from his private purse. These charges were supplied by a well-ordered economy in his own fortune, and a regular administration of the public finances. He lived himself always with ancient simplicity, and he enriched the state by a careful attention to the minutest articles of public expenditure. Under this excellent mode of government every thing enjoyed its due consideration. The literary ornaments of the court of Trajan were Pliny the younger, the poet Juvenal, and those excellent writers, Tacitus and Plutarch. Their talents and genius were encouraged and liberally rewarded, whilst the fine arts also were assiduously cultivated, and flourished under that generous spirit of independence which prevailed throughout every branch of the state. Trajan himself, amidst the duties of sovereignty, enjoyed the greatest happiness which could belong to a private station. He walked through the streets of Rome, without guard or attendant, as a private individual, more secure in the love and affection of his subjects, than in the strength of an imperial retinue. He lived with his friends on terms of the most familiar intercourse; he shared in all their amusements; and there was between them an interchange of every kind and affectionate duty. Such was the virtuous and venerable Trajan, whose character so justly merited the surname universally given him, *Trajanus Optimus*. He died at the age of sixty-three, after a reign of nineteen years, a period during which Rome may be said to have been truly happy.

Ælius Adrianus, on the pretence of having been adopted by Trajan in his last moments, took advantage of his command of the army then at Antioch, and prevailed with them to proclaim him emperor. Trajan had been his tutor, and had given him his grand-niece in marriage. These circumstances gave a colorable title to his pretence of adoption, and the senate, therefore, did not think proper to dispute his right. It was the first measure of his reign to abandon all the conquests of Trajan. He restored to the Parthians the election of an independent sovereign; established Chosroes in his dominions; withdrew the Roman garrisons from the provinces of Armenia, Mesopotamia, and Assyria; and, in compliance with the precept of Augustus, once more confined the

Eastern empire within the bounds of the Euphrates. For this conduct various motives have been assigned. It has been ascribed to envy of the glory of his predecessor; but Gibbon justly observes, that he could scarcely place the superiority of Trajan in a more conspicuous light, than by thus confessing himself unequal even to retain what the former had subdued. Indolence, and an aversion to war, have been brought forward as his motives, but Adrian was, in fact, an excellent soldier, equally fearless of danger or of fatigue. It is certainly more natural and reasonable to ascribe to policy and prudence, a measure which eventually was conducive to the happiness and security of the state. The Parthians, he well knew, could not, from the natural strength of their country, be long kept under the yoke. Adrian foresaw in Parthia the future cradle of numerous and destructive wars, and he preferred the peace and security of the empire to this destructive prospect.

On his return to Rome, his conduct was such as to ingratiate him with every rank of the citizens. He remitted all the debts due to the treasury for the last sixteen years, by burning the records and obligations. He bestowed liberal presents upon those amongst the ancient families who had fallen into indigence, and appointed new funds for the maintenance and education of the children of the poor. He then undertook a progress through all the provinces of the empire, repressing abuses, and studiously relieving the people wherever he found the taxes too heavy or exorbitant. He rebuilt many cities which had been destroyed or had fallen into ruin. Amongst the rest he rebuilt Jerusalem, which he named *Ælia Capitolina*. In these progresses through his dominions, so careful was he in avoiding every thing which might distress the provinces, that he used no equipage or show, but travelled on foot, and lived with the frugality of a common soldier. This exemplary conduct made him beloved and respected by his subjects, as much as he was formidable to the enemies of the empire from his courage and resolution. His popularity became so great, that he stood not in need of the ensigns of power and authority. The guards, and the fasces, he deemed superfluous to him who made it his study to reign, not over the persons, but over the hearts of his subjects. Although, certainly, a few instances of severity had clouded the commencement of his reign, yet these were dictated by necessity whilst his authority was insecure. No sooner was he firmly seated on the throne, than his clemency and bounty were extended to all ranks of his subjects. To the talents of an experienced captain and a skilful politician, Adrian joined an excellent taste in the liberal arts, and a strong disposition towards the advancement of science and political literature. He was an admirer of poetry, music, and painting, and was himself a proficient in those arts. He seemed endowed with a universal genius, not only being eminent for those nobler qualities which constitute the

higher virtues of an emperor, but for those inferior, but not less attractive, graces which accompany an accomplished and cultivated mind. Envy has certainly stained the memory of this great prince with some immoralities; but, as for the truth of these there appears no foundation, it is becoming in the historian rather to bury them in oblivion, than to transmit even the suspicion of them to posterity. On the whole, the reign of Adrian was to the Roman people a period of unusual splendor, attended with what it seldom brings along with it,—uncommon public happiness.

In the twenty-second and last year of his reign, he adopted and declared for his successor Titus Aurelius Antoninus, a man of exemplary character and exalted merit. But not satisfied with this immediate instance of regard for posterity, he declared Aurelius his successor, on condition that he should, in his turn, adopt Annius Verus, a young man every way worthy of the throne, and to whom it should descend on his decease. These two were the Antonines, who for forty years governed the Roman empire with consummate wisdom, ability, and rectitude. Soon after having made this valuable bequest to his country, Adrian fell into a lingering and mortal disease. It was under the pressure of this disease, and in full conviction of his approaching dissolution, that he wrote those beautiful and well-known lines addressed to his soul, which bear so strongly the mark of a tranquil and philosophic mind convinced of its immortality, but anxious for its unknown destination.

*Animula vagula, blandula,
Hospes, comesque corporis,
Quæ nunc abibis in loca;
Pallidula, frigida, nudula—
Nec ut soles dabis joca?**

We have now arrived at the age of the Antonines, the short remaining period of the union and prosperity of the Roman Empire.

* Pope's translation of these lines is in everybody's hands.

CHAPTER II.

Age of the Antonines—Commodus—Pertinax—The Prætorian Guards sell the Empire by auction—Four Emperors proclaimed—Severus marches to Rome and disbands the Prætorian Guards—War in Britain—Severus dies at York—Caracalla—Disorders in the Empire continue till the Reign of Diocletian—Constantine—His zeal for Christianity.

THE reign of Antoninus Pius offers but few remarkable events to the pen of the historian, as, indeed, generally do such reigns as are the most happy. His character was that of the true philosopher, and the father of his people. He was likewise an excellent politician, and his attention to the cares of the state was indefatigable. Amongst others of his wise regulations may be reckoned that law which prohibited any person, once acquitted, to be tried again for the same crime. Generous to others, and himself perfectly disinterested, he bestowed his whole private fortune in repairing the losses and alleviating the calamities of the wretched. As he was secure of his authority, which was firmly seated in the affections of his people, he had no mean jealousy of the power of his ministers and magistrates; he raised the dignity and character of the senate, by regulating his own conduct according to its directions in the administration of all public affairs. The love and esteem of his subjects were only equalled by the respect entertained for his character by foreign nations. He was made the umpire of the differences of contending states, and received the voluntary homage of princes over whom he had no other authority than what the admiration of his wisdom and eminent virtues bestowed. This excellent prince, the idol of his subjects, died in the seventy-fourth year of his age, after a happy and prosperous reign of twenty-two years. He had, in the beginning of his reign, given his daughter Faustina, together with the title of Cæsar, to his successor, who had been pointed out by Adrian, Annius Verus, a man in every respect worthy to fill his place.

Annius was of an ancient and honorable family. On his accession to the empire, he changed this name for that of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, and he bestowed that of Verus upon Lucius Commodus, his brother by adoption. The Stoical philosophy was, at this time, in Rome, the most prevalent of all the sects. It gained credit with men of worth and probity from its opposition to the licentious manners of the times. Marcus Aurelius was by