

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

nature attached to this philosophy, still more than by education. His morals were pure, his manners simple, and his virtues the result of his natural disposition. His *Meditations*, which are still extant, and which were composed amidst the tumult of a military life, abound with the most exalted and beautiful sentiments of piety and morality.

Antoninus had preferred M. Aurelius to Lucius Verus, with whose vicious disposition he was well acquainted. Yet the generosity of Marcus made him hasten to admit this unworthy brother to a share in the empire—an action which can admit of no justification. Rome had now, in fact, two emperors; and those who loved their country prayed as earnestly for the life of Marcus Aurelius as they did that Verus might not survive him. The Parthians, judging the death of Antoninus Pius a favorable opportunity to attack the empire, entered Armenia, and there cut to pieces the Roman army. They proceeded thence to ravage Syria, and an inroad was made at the same time by the Catti into Germany. Marcus Aurelius sent L. Verus against the Parthians, but that debauched and abandoned youth trusted to his generals the whole conduct of the expedition, whilst he himself spent his time between Antioch and Laodicea in the lowest excesses. His generals, however, were victorious, and he, proud of the laurels he had not won, returned at the head of his troops into Italy, where he carried with him a most dreadful pestilence which almost depopulated that country, and continued to rage for many years from province to province through the whole empire.

During this calamity many of the German nations took up arms—the Vandals, Dacians, Quadi, Suevi, and Alemanni. They laid waste Pannonia, and thence penetrated into Greece, where they ravaged even the Peloponnesus. In this concurrence of misfortunes, the public finances were exhausted to afford the requisite succors; and Aurelius, instead of the usual resource of increasing the taxes, adopted the generous expedient of divesting himself of his whole fortune to supply the deficiency, and sold for the public benefit even the furniture of his palaces. It was necessary to take immediate measures for reducing the rebellion in Germany. The emperor, who had now experienced the disposition of L. Verus, could neither venture to trust him with the command of the army, nor with the equally important task of governing Rome in his absence. He therefore, in concert with the senate, obtained from them a decree, that both the Augusti should march against the revolted nations. They accordingly set out together for Aquileia, but Marcus Aurelius was in a few months happily deprived of his colleague, and the empire of its fears, by the death of Verus. Of this German war historians have furnished us with no detail; Marcus Aurelius, we know, finished it in a few campaigns, and had granted the rebellious nations favorable terms of peace, when he was recalled to Italy by the revolt

of Avidius Cassius, who, upon a false report of his death, had caused himself to be proclaimed emperor. This insurrection, however, was speedily terminated by the death of Cassius, who was murdered by one of his own officers.

Aurelius now undertook a progress into Asia, where some disorders had made his presence necessary. Here he received the homage of all the eastern nations. He appeared, says an ancient author of that time, like a benevolent deity, diffusing around him universal peace and happiness; he was absent from Rome seven years, and his return was celebrated by the sincerest joy of his people.

His last military expedition was against the Marcomanni, and others of the German nations, who had again taken up arms. He had proceeded far to the reduction of these obstinate rebels, whom he must soon have brought under subjection, when, to the unspeakable grief and loss of the empire, he died in Pannonia, in the fifty-ninth year of his age, and the nineteenth of his reign. His memory was long revered by posterity, and above a century after his death many persons preserved the image of Marcus Aurelius among their household gods. From the death of Domitian, which happened in the 96th year of the Christian era, to that of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, which took place in the 180th, a period of eighty-four years, the Roman empire had enjoyed the greatest prosperity and happiness. It was governed by absolute power, but this power was under the direction of wisdom and virtue. "The armies," says Gibbon, "were restrained by the firm, yet gentle hand of five successive emperors, whose characters and authority commanded involuntary respect. The forms of the civil administration were carefully preserved by Trajan, Adrian, and the Antonines, who delighted in the image of liberty, and were pleased with considering themselves as the accountable ministers of the laws. Such princes deserved the honor of restoring the republic, had the Romans of their days been capable of enjoying a rational freedom."

Commodus was born soon after the elevation of his father Marcus Aurelius to the throne. He inherited none of the virtues of Aurelius, but resembled much his mother Faustina, a princess second only to Messalina in every species of vice. It was almost the only weakness of M. Aurelius, that he was blind to the infamous character of his wife and son. He even conferred honors and titles on those whom all but himself knew to be the acknowledged gallants of Faustina; and by a blamable innovation, he had caused his son Commodus to be declared Augustus in his own lifetime. Commodus was in his twentieth year, when, by the death of his father, he succeeded to the throne. His first step was to purchase a disgraceful peace with the barbarians in Germany—impatient to get rid, without the fatigue of fighting, of the trouble of a war. From his infancy he had discovered an

aversion to whatever was rational or liberal, and an excessive attachment to the amusements of the populace, the sports of the circus and amphitheatre, the combats of gladiators, and the hunting of wild beasts. It was his highest and only ambition to excel in these exercises: he fought as a common gladiator in the circus—and his favorite epithet was that of the Roman Hercules, which is still to be seen upon his coins and medals. His whole conduct was equally odious and contemptible, and the public measures of his reign consist of nothing but the detection of some conspiracies which the hatred of his subjects and his own cruelty and inhumanity could not fail to excite. One conspiracy, at length, delivered the empire of its tyrant. His concubine Marcia, his chamberlain, and the commander of his guard, had ventured to remonstrate with him on the indecency of an emperor displaying himself as a combatant in the public games. This was an offence which could not be forgiven, and he accordingly determined their immediate destruction. Marcia found the list of his intended victims written in his own hand. She made haste to anticipate his purpose, and caused this worthless and inglorious wretch to be strangled, in the thirty-second year of his age and the thirteenth of his reign.

Lætus, captain of the prætorian guards, who had conducted the conspiracy which rid the world of Commodus, bestowed the empire on Publius Helvetius Pertinax, a man of obscure extraction, but who, by his virtues and military talents, had raised himself to rank and esteem. The soldiers were promised a large donative, and the people, who respected the character of Pertinax, recognised him for their sovereign with the utmost demonstrations of joy. He applied himself immediately to the reformation of the abuses introduced by his predecessor, but his zeal for this reformation transported him beyond the bounds of prudence. The prætorian guards, debauched and effeminate in their morals and constitution, bore with great impatience the severity of that discipline to which they were now subjected, and regretted the happy licentiousness of the former reign. Lætus, the prefect, who expected that his services would entitle him to rule as a favorite minister, was disappointed by the austerity of the government of Pertinax. These discontents soon increased to such a degree as to become insurmountable; and the too virtuous Pertinax, after a reign of only eighty-six days, was openly murdered in the palace by the same hands which had placed him on the throne.

A transaction followed which was shameful beyond example: Sulpicianus, the father-in-law of Pertinax, demanded the empire from the prætorians, who replied to him, that he should have his chance for it at a fair auction, as they had resolved to bestow it on the highest bidder. Didius Julianus, a wealthy senator, was at table when this intelligence was brought him. His wife, and the parasites who surrounded him, persuaded him he should embrace

this opportunity of ascending a throne, which his virtues had long merited. He repaired instantly to the prætorian camp, and bidding at once a considerable sum beyond the offer of Sulpicianus, he was immediately proclaimed emperor. The obsequious senate made no scruple to confirm this election. He took his way to the palace, where, it is said, the first object that struck his eyes was the headless trunk of Pertinax, and the frugal entertainment which had been prepared for his supper. He viewed both with equal indifference, for he foresaw not what awaited him.

The people, not yet lost to every sense of their own importance, considered this measure as the last and severest insult on the Roman name. They gave free vent to their opinions; they openly execrated Didius as a usurper, and invited the legions in the provinces to assert the injured dignity of the empire. Amongst the generals who commanded these distant legions was Porsennius Niger. He was at that time in the government of Syria, when he received the request of the people to avenge the murder of Pertinax. The people of Asia solicited him to assume the purple himself, and he was easily prevailed upon. But at the same time that he was proclaimed in Asia, Decimus Clodius Albinus was proclaimed by the troops in Britain, and Septimus Severus in Illyria. Albinus, of known courage but of doubtful moral character, was sprung from one of the noblest families in Rome. Severus, an African by birth, owed his favor with the soldiers in a great measure to the high regard he had always professed for the character of Pertinax; but above all, to the promise of a donative superior to the price at which the wealthy Didius had purchased the empire. Saluted by his soldiers with the highest acclamations, and hailed by the title of Augustus, Severus marched directly to Rome. The prætorians, on the news of his approach, immediately abandoned Didius to his fate: and the senate, without ceremony condemned him to be executed in the imperial palace. He reigned sixty-six days.

The almost incredible expedition of Severus, who conducted in a few days a numerous army from the banks of the Danube to those of the Tiber, proves at once, as Mr. Gibbon has remarked, the uncommon plenty produced at this time by the agriculture and commerce of the empire, the good state of the roads, the discipline of the legions, and the indolent, subdued temper of the provinces.

Severus immediately ordered the corrupted and insolent troops of the prætorians to assemble unarmed on a large plain without the city. They obeyed in terror for their fate. He caused them to be surrounded with the Illyrian legions, and then sharply reproaching them with the murder of Pertinax, and the disgraceful sale of the empire, (which he and his troops had, however, so accurately imitated,) he dismissed them with ignominy from their trust, and banished the whole of them, on pain of death, to the dis-