

tance of one hundred miles from Rome. He then created a new guard, which he composed of soldiers of all different countries.

Matters in the meantime wore an unfavorable aspect in the extremities of the empire. Both the east and west were in arms against Severus. Finding himself unable at the same time to march against both, he endeavored to secure the friendship of Albinus, by appointing him his successor in the empire, with the title of Cæsar; and having thus conciliated this powerful rival, he instantly marched against Niger in Asia. The armies soon met; and by the successful issue of three battles, in one of which Niger lost his life, he found himself without a rival, and master of the empire. His victories were succeeded by a conduct little short of that of a Marius or an Octavius. His proscription almost exterminated the army of Niger; and the miserable remnant which escaped were driven to seek shelter amongst the Parthians, to whom they taught the use of the Roman arms.

Severus was now no longer under the necessity of keeping terms with Albinus. He deprived him accordingly of the title of Cæsar, evincing clearly that it had been from necessity, not choice, he had ever bestowed it. Provoked at this usage, Albinus assumed a more illustrious denomination, caused himself to be proclaimed emperor, and marched for Italy. Fortune still attended the arms of Severus; he defeated Albinus in a decisive battle near Lyons; and this general, anticipating the fate which awaited him, preferred dying by his own hand. The temper of Severus, naturally cruel, found many victims in those who had favored the parties of his rival competitors. He examined the papers of Albinus, and thence found pretext for sacrificing forty of the senators. He seemed to take pleasure in degrading that order, and his intention seemed to be to extinguish every trace of the ancient republican administration, and erect the perfect fabric of an absolute monarchy. It became, therefore, his object to gain the affection of the soldiers, whom he attached to himself by every favor which he could bestow. Nor was his policy less conspicuous in the employment of men of talents, who in their writings and discourses instilled into the minds of the people the doctrines of passive obedience, and duty of absolute submission to the will of their master. Dion Cassius, the historian, appears to have been commissioned to form these opinions into a system, and the Pandectæ of the Roman law afford evidence that the advocates and judges coöperated all to the same end.

Having thus secured his authority by every precaution which he esteemed necessary, he applied himself, with a policy certainly both able and praiseworthy, to promote the interests of the empire. His conduct in the administration of justice was exemplary. His laws were wise and judicious, and the fame of the Roman arms in no period since the republic had risen higher than in the reign of Severus. He delighted to affirm, and he had reason

certainly to glory in it, that having received the empire oppressed with foreign and domestic wars, he left it in profound, universal, and honorable peace. To the military and political talents of Severus was added a taste for the fine arts, more especially for architecture. The most eminent of the civil lawyers flourished under his reign—Ulpian, Paulus, and Papinian, who brought the system of Roman jurisprudence to its highest perfection.

Severus had two sons, Caracalla and Geta, who distinguished themselves in their infancy by a fixed and implacable hatred against each other. This unhappy and unnatural discord clouded the latter days of Severus. With a view of obviating the evil effects which the flattery of a court produced on their minds, the emperor seized the occasion of the war in Britain to carry them along with him, after associating them both with himself in the empire. Severus was at this time sixty years of age, and enfeebled with disease. The Caledonians, under the command of Fingal, invaded the Roman frontier, and defeated, on the banks of the river Carron, Caracalla, whom Ossian names *the son of the king of the world*. During the course of this war in Britain, it is shocking to relate that the abandoned Caracalla more than once attempted the life of his father, who, at length, broken by disease, died at York, in the 211th year of the Christian era. Caracalla and Geta agreed to divide the empire, the former retaining the western part, and the latter, Asia and the eastern provinces. The mutual hatred of these two brothers was now fomented by their association in the government. Caracalla, at length worn out by the struggle, and unable to bear longer with his rival, caused him to be openly assassinated in the arms of his mother Julia, and had the address to persuade the people that he was compelled to this atrocious deed by motives of self-preservation. On this subject Ælius Spartianus has transmitted a fact, which strongly marks the degeneracy of the Roman character, and that abject servility with which the highest ranks of the state submitted to the yoke of tyranny.

Caracalla, after the death of his brother Geta, thought it necessary to apologize to the senate for a deed so dark and unnatural. He ordered a body of his guards to enter the senate-house, and two armed soldiers to post themselves at the side of every senator. Then gravely walking up to the consul's chair, he pronounced a studied harangue, setting forth the imperious necessity of the action, and urging that his concern for the interests of the state had, in this single instance, overcome his fraternal affection and the humanity of his nature. It may be believed that the Conscript Fathers were in no disposition to dispute the force of his arguments. Caracalla was now proclaimed sole emperor, and one of the first acts of his administration was to put to death the celebrated lawyer Papinian, who had refused to justify his conduct to the people. His reign, which was nothing but one continued scene

of most complicated cruelties, was at last terminated by the assassination of the tyrant, in the sixth year of his government.

Those disorders in the empire which, as we have seen, began with the reign of Commodus, continued for about a century, till the accession of Diocletian. That interval was filled up by the reigns of Heliogabalus, Alexander Severus, Maximin, Gordian, Decius Gallus, Valerianus, Gallienus, Claudius, Aurelian, Tacitus, Probus, and Carus. The history of those reigns has been brilliantly given by Mr. Gibbon: and pleasure and profit must ever accompany the productions of that able, though sometimes dangerous, pen; but our plan confines us necessarily to such general views as furnish useful lessons of the knowledge of mankind, and, excluding all minuteness of detail, looks only to those circumstances which may tend to illustrate the great doctrines of politics or of morality. In that catalogue of names which we enumerated, Valerian, a prince of considerable virtues, but enfeebled by age before he attained the empire, was the first of the Roman emperors who perished in captivity. In an unsuccessful expedition against Sapor, king of Persia, he was taken prisoner, treated, as is said, with every circumstance of indignity, and languished the remainder of his days in misery. During the reign of his son Gallienus, there were actually nineteen pretenders to the sovereignty of different parts of the Roman empire. One of these, a native of Palmyra, Odenathus, by an effectual opposition to the progress of Sapor in Syria, was the preserver of that valuable province. Gallienus, sensible of his merits, conferred on him the title of Augustus; and Odenathus, like an independent sovereign, bequeathed at his death his crown to his widow Zenobia. Claudius, the successor of Gallienus, occupied in his wars against the German nations, allowed Zenobia to reign in peace over several of the Asiatic provinces, to which she added, by conquest, the kingdom of Egypt. For five years she maintained a splendid and politic dominion. But Aurelian, the successor of Claudius, after the reduction of the Germans, and the recovery of Gaul, Spain, and Britain, out of the hands of Tetricus, a bold usurper, turned the arms of the empire against this heroic queen of the East. She defended her dominions with a manly spirit, and maintained a siege in her capital of Palmyra, which for a while baffled the utmost efforts of the Roman arms. The city, however, at length surrendered, and Zenobia, attempting to escape by flight upon the back of a dromedary, was taken and conveyed a prisoner to Aurelian. He brought the captive princess to Rome, where she, together with Tetricus, graced the triumph of Aurelian; the queen bound in fetters of gold. The emperor assigned her an elegant villa, near Rome, for her residence. The Syrian queen gradually sunk into a Roman matron; her daughters married into Roman families; and her race was not yet extinct in the fifth century.

The succeeding reigns of Tacitus, Probus, and Carus, occupy

a space of nine years, in the first seven of which—the reigns of Tacitus and Probus—the Roman empire was seen in a state both of splendor and of happiness. To Carus succeeded Diocletian, who began his reign in the 284th year of the Christian era, and who soon evinced himself a prince of the greatest talents in every respect, but more especially as a politician. He may be considered, like Augustus, as the founder of a new empire. By birth a Dalmatian, and of mean extraction, he had yet raised himself, by his merit, to the supreme command in the army, and, having gained the empire, he determined to govern it by a new system of administration. He divided into four different governments the whole of the imperial dominions, and all the departments of authority, civil and military. There were appointed to these, four different governors, with equal powers. Diocletian associated Maximian with himself as his colleague in the empire, with the title of Augustus; and bestowed on his two generals, Galerius and Constantius, the titles of Cæsars.

The four princes had each their distinct department: Galerius was stationed on the Danube to guard the Illyrian provinces; Constantius had the command of Gaul, Spain, and Britain; Maximian that of Italy and Africa; and Diocletian of Thrace, Egypt, and the Asiatic provinces. Each was supreme in his own district, and, what is truly singular, and evinces the talents of Diocletian, all lived in harmony, and in the most perfect good understanding with each other. This plan of dividing the empire was evidently a bad one in itself, nor could it possibly have been supported but by the superior and controlling genius of Diocletian. He allotted, in appearance, an equality of powers to his colleagues; but, in fact, the eminence of his own character and the superiority of his genius gave him always a decided preeminence, and the other princes were little more than his viceroys or lieutenants. At times he would make them understand this even with arrogance and harshness. Galerius had been defeated by the Persians, on which occasion Diocletian treated him with the utmost contempt, making him follow his chariot on foot; nor was he restored to favor till he had by his successes regained his credit, and with this an equality of power.

Under the reign of this emperor, all vestiges of the ancient liberty of the Roman constitution were entirely annihilated. The sovereign assumed that ensign of royalty most odious to the Romans, the diadem, and introduced at home all the magnificent ceremonial of the Persian court. The name of the Senate of Rome continued to be respected, but this body ceased to have the smallest weight or influence in affairs of state. By the vigor of Diocletian's administration, and the active abilities of his associates in power, the Roman arms regained for a while their ancient splendor, and general good order pervaded the empire. It was during this reign, also, that the northern barbarians, who for some

time before had made themselves known by some partial irruptions, poured down in prodigious swarms upon the extremities of the empire. The Scythians, Goths, Sarmatians, Alani, and Quadi, began to make dreadful inroads, and for a while every successive defeat seemed only to increase their strength and perseverance.

At this period, Diocletian, along with his colleague Maximian, surprised the world by resigning at once the royal dignity, and leaving the government in the hands of the two Cæsars, voluntarily returned to the condition of private citizens. Diocletian retired to Salona, the place of his nativity, now Spalatro, in Dalmatia, where he built a palace superior in extent and magnificence to any of his predecessors. In this seclusion from the cares of government he lived for several years, and was wont to say, that he counted the day of his retreat as the beginning of his life. Maximian, who had abdicated not from individual choice, but in consequence of a promise exacted on his admission to a share in the government, retired less willingly to Lucania. Constantius and Galerius now jointly governed the Roman empire, but soon after, Constantius died in Britain, and his son Constantine, succeeding in the command of the troops, caused himself to be proclaimed emperor in the city of York. He immediately acquainted Galerius of this event, who was by no means heartily disposed to acknowledge his nomination. On Constantine he conferred, or rather continued to him, the title of Cæsar, whilst he associated with himself in the *empire* his favorite Severus. Meanwhile, Maximian was prevailed upon by his son Maxentius to abandon his retirement, and to resume the purple. They engaged, defeated, and put to death Severus; and Maximian, to unite his interest with Constantine against Galerius, gave him his daughter in marriage, by which alliance Constantine acquired a double title to the empire. Soon after this, Maximian, for what cause is not ascertained, died by his own hand, and Galerius was carried off by a mortal disease. Maxentius and Constantine, therefore, remained upon the stage to contend for the prize of undivided empire. It was at this time that Constantine, being converted to Christianity—(as is said, by a miraculous vision.)—the true religion, after struggling with every opposition which ignorance, credulity, and persecution could have brought against it, ascended at last the imperial throne. Maxentius, on the other hand, from hatred to his rival, exerted himself in the most violent persecution of all who professed that religion. The Christians were at this time extremely numerous, both at Rome and in the provinces, and it became, therefore, an event of the greatest joy to them, that Maxentius in the first battle was defeated and slain, leaving Constantine undisputed master of the Roman empire.

The first step of his administration was to break up the pretorian bands, a measure equally politic for his own safety and agreeable to the people. He re-established the senate in its ancient deliber-

ative rights; commenced the repair of Rome and the other cities of Italy; and used his utmost endeavor by a firm, though a gentle and equitable administration, to promote the happiness and interest of his people. Aware of the danger of disgusting the public mind by any sudden or violent innovation upon those opinions which long custom had rendered sacred, he accepted the title of *Pontifex Maximus*, and in his first edicts only granted to the Christians the public exercise of their religion; but his own example daily increased the number of proselytes, and he soon after began to establish churches for their worship. In these first years of his reign, the civil administration of Constantine was excellent. Every approach to oppression in the officers of the revenue met with an immediate check, and he abrogated that cruel institution which inflicted corporal punishment upon those who were debtors to the state. His maxim was; that equity ought ever to preponderate over strict law, and ought to determine all cases wherein law is doubtful. But amid these excellent features in the character of Constantine, it is painful to remark that a disposition to cruelty appeared, which sullied much of his glory. In an expedition against the Franks, a northern nation who had begun to make inroads on the Gauls, the prisoners taken in war were, with the most shocking inhumanity, exposed in the amphitheatre to be devoured by wild beasts.

One Licinius, a Dacian, had by Galerius been nominated Cæsar, and on the death of Galerius maintained possession of the Asiatic provinces. Constantine had not thought it expedient to dispute his right, while as yet his own was not thoroughly established, and had even virtually acknowledged it by giving him his sister in marriage. Licinius was a persecutor of the Christians, and this became soon a sufficient ground for Constantine to shake him off. He accordingly declared war against him as an enemy to God, and arming a fleet of 200 galleys, and 130,000 men, he attacked him in Asia, and gained a complete victory. His rival was made prisoner, and was promised his life, but this promise was shamefully and dishonorably broken, and Licinius strangled in prison.

Constantine, now absolute and sole master of the empire, proceeded openly to signalize his zeal for Christianity. He ordered the temples to be shut, and prohibited sacrifices, but at the same time published an edict in the East, allowing universal toleration. This edict, however, which certainly seemed inconsistent with the general tenor of his principles, could not prevent the rising of a fanatical zeal for their peculiar tenets in the minds both of Christians and of heathens, which soon produced the most violent and irreconcilable animosities. Constantine, returning from his Asiatic expedition, alienated the minds of his Roman subjects by two extraordinary acts of cruelty, the murder of his son Crispus and his step-mother Fausta, upon light suspicions of some infamous connections having taken place between them. Many other indi-

viduals of rank were put to death on the evidence of informers, and on the most vague and general suspicions. The cruelty of the emperor became excessive. Rome cried out against him as a second Nero, and the populace openly insulted him.

Whether it was the disgust he conceived at this decided change in the minds of the Romans, or solely an ambitious and unsettled disposition which led to his design of altering the seat of empire, it is not easy to determine. He fixed his eyes, however, on Byzantium, to which he gave the name of Constantinople. He erected there the most superb structures, and in order to people his new city, he made a law by which no Asiatic should have the right of disposing of his estate by testament, unless he possessed a dwelling-house in Constantinople. Those, again, who resided there were gratified by a variety of alluring privileges; and by means of these he drew the poorer inhabitants from Rome, whilst the richer voluntarily followed the prince and his court. The grandes brought with them their slaves, and Rome in a few years became almost depopulated. Italy was also greatly exhausted of her inhabitants, and Constantinople swelled at once to the most overgrown dimensions. When the empire was thus divided, all riches naturally centered in the new capital. At this period, the German mines were unknown, those of Italy and Gaul were inconsiderable, as were also those of Spain. Italy was now a waste of desolated gardens. It had no pecuniary supplies from commerce, and being still subjected to the same taxes as when it was the seat of empire, its miserable situation may be easily conceived.

After thus weakening or rather annihilating the ancient capital of the empire, Constantine drew off from the frontiers the legions which were stationed on the banks of the large rivers, and distributed them into the provinces. This measure had two most pernicious effects. It left the frontiers to the mercy of the barbarous nations, and enervated the troops by the effeminate pleasures of the great cities. Luxury, which, in all its different shapes, pervaded even the extremities of the empire, reigned absolute in the centre. Constantine himself in every thing affected the Asiatic splendor and ceremonial. He wore the diadem, and assumed a number of high-sounding, empty titles; his amusements were at once costly and effeminate; his festivals and public spectacles most profusely luxurious. Towards the conclusion of his reign, the Goths, making another invasion, were repulsed and defeated, but by imprudently raising many of them to offices of dignity, he gave to these barbarians a kind of footing in the Roman empire.

Sapor II., king of Persia, having made an inroad upon Mesopotamia, Constantine marched against him. He repulsed the Persian troops, but after the victory fell sick at Nicomedia, and there died at the age of sixty-three, and in the thirtieth year of his reign. His character cannot easily be drawn with impartiality. Talents and ability in no common degree he certainly possessed

but as to the other points of his character, the professed pictures of historians are so extremely contradictory, that neither Pagan nor Christian writers deserve to be in any degree relied on. By the one class he is held forth as a shining example of universal virtue; by the other he is represented as a Proteus in every variety of vice. "We may," says the Abbé Fleury, "form an impartial judgment of the character of this emperor, by believing all the faults ascribed to him by the Bishop Eusebius, and all the good spoken of him by Zosimus."*

CHAPTER III.

Change in the System of Policy and Government introduced by Constantine—Pretorian Prefects—Proconsuls—Counts and Dukes—Taxes—Free Gifts—Seat of Empire translated to Constantinople—Division of the Empire—Julian—His artful Hostility to Christianity—Jovian—Valentinian—Irruptions of the Goths—Of the Huns—Valens—Gratian—Theodosius—Valentinian the Second.

THERE were circumstances which rendered the reign of Constantine a remarkable epoch in the history of the Roman empire; and, as it is of consequence that we should become acquainted with that new system of policy and government which at this time was introduced, and which was so materially different from that constitution with which we have hitherto been acquainted, a few observations upon this subject may neither be impertinent nor uninteresting; more especially as they are connected with those internal causes which were now silently undermining the Roman power.

The distinctions of personal merit, so conspicuous under the republican form of government, were gradually weakening from the time that the imperial dignity arose, and now were almost totally obliterated. In their room was substituted a rigid subordination of rank and office, which went through all the departments of the state. Every rank was fixed, its dignity was displayed in a variety of trifling ceremonies; and, as Mr. Gibbon has remarked, in his favorite metaphoric style, "At this time the system of the Roman government might, by a philosophic observer, have been mistaken for a splendid theatre filled with players of every

* Hist. Eccl., tome iii. p. 233.