

with the utmost jealousy and rancor. It seemed impossible that the empire could be governed in common by men whose hostility to each other was so deadly, and it was proposed that they should divide the empire between them. Some progress had been made in the negotiation, upon the basis that Caracalla, as the elder, should reside in Rome, and retain dominion over Europe and western Africa, while Geta, selecting Antioch or Alexandria as his capital, should exercise sovereignty over Asia and Egypt. Numerous armies were to be encamped on each shore of the Thracian Bosphorus to protect the frontiers of the rival monarchies.

This plan for a dismemberment of the empire, merely to gratify the passions of two worthless young men, excited indignation in almost every Roman breast. Caracalla reflected that one dagger thrust, one cup of poison would relieve him from all these embarrassments, and with new energy he prepared to put his brother out of the way. Feigning desire for reconciliation, he proposed a friendly meeting in the apartment of their mother. In the midst of the conversation, two assassins, who had been concealed, rushed in, and, with the assistance of Caracalla cut down Geta, and he died in his mother's arms, drenching her garments with his blood. She herself was severely wounded in the endeavor to shield her son from the daggers which were aimed at him.

Caracalla easily secured the support of the army with vast bribes. The senate was now ever ready to do homage to successful power. The only redeeming trait in the character of Caracalla is to be found in the fact that he could not escape the stings of remorse. The image of his brother, bleeding, struggling, dying, in the arms of his terrified, shrieking mother, pursued the murderer to his grave. But this remorse only goaded him to new crimes. Julia, his mother, was threatened with instant death if she did not cease her lamentations, and receive Caracalla with smiles of approbation and joy. Every one who was supposed to be in the interest of Geta, without regard

to age or sex, was put to death. More than twenty thousand perished in this wholesale proscription. The friends of the executed were compelled to hide their tears, for the slightest indication of sympathy was sure to call down the vengeance of the tyrant.

About a year after the death of Geta, Caracalla left Rome, to visit the distant provinces of his empire. His path was everywhere marked with the traces of extortion, rapine, and violence. A large number of the senate were compelled to accompany him, and to provide in every city the most costly entertainments. New and ingenious forms of taxation were invented, and the wealthy families were ruined by fines and confiscations. In consequence of a lampoon, which some wag in Alexandria had composed, Caracalla issued an order for the general massacre of the inhabitants. A demon could hardly have been more wanton and perfidious in cruelty. But enormous gifts to the army, with the permission of any amount of license, secured the support of their swords. With such support he had few enemies to fear. The resources of the state were exhausted to enrich the soldiers, "whose modesty in peace, and service in war," Gibbon has well observed, "is best secured by an honorable poverty."

One of the emperor's generals, Macrinus, who commanded the imperial forces in Mesopotamia, accidentally discovered that he had excited the suspicions of Caracalla, and was consequently doomed to death. In his despair he engaged one of his centurions, a man of herculean strength, to assassinate the emperor. Watching his opportunity, as the emperor was riding out one day, in the vicinity of Edessa, the centurion stabbed him in the back, killing him instantly. The assassin, however, paid the forfeit of his own life, for he was immediately cut down by the guard. Thus terminated the diabolical sway of Caracalla, with which God had allowed the world to be cursed for six years.

The army now looked around for a successor, and after an

interval of three days fixed upon Macrinus, who made them great promises. The appointment was sent to the senate, and was submissively confirmed. But Macrinus was neither illustrious through lineage, wealth, nor exploits; and gradually murmurs began to arise against the bestowal of the imperial purple upon one so obscure. These murmurs were loudly increased by his cautious attempts to introduce a few reforms into the army. He did not venture to meddle with the privileges and extravagant pay which the soldiers who were already engaged received, but endeavored to organize new recruits upon a more economical basis. The army was encamped in winter quarters in Syria. Macrinus, with a division of the army, as his ostentatious retinue, was luxuriating in the imperial palace at Antioch.

Under these circumstances, a Syrian, named Elagabalus, under the pretense that he was the son of one of the concubines of Caracalla, whose memory the corrupt army adored, formed a conspiracy, and, supported by the encamped troops, declared himself emperor and marched upon Antioch. The soldiers, eager for the renewal of their former license, with enthusiasm, cohort after cohort, abandoned Macrinus, and joined Elagabalus. One battle finished the strife, Macrinus was slain, and all the troops flocked to the banners of the conqueror. But twenty days elapsed from the commencement of the strife to the victory of Elagabalus. The powerless senate dared not remonstrate against the sword of the army, and confirmed with exemplary docility, their choice of a new emperor. The reign of Macrinus lasted but one year and two months.

Elagabalus passed the winter in riotous living with his generals in Nicomedia, and early in the spring commenced a triumphal march toward Rome. As he had formerly been, in the idolatrous worship of the East, high priest of the sun, he entered Rome in the double character of pontiff and emperor. The streets through which he passed were sprinkled with gold

dust. Elagabalus, arrayed in sacerdotal robes of silk and gold, with a gorgeous tiara upon his brow, and with bracelets and collars studded with inestimable gems, led six milk white horses, most sumptuously caparisoned, drawing a chariot containing the black, conical stone which was the symbol of the god at whose shrine he ministered. In his character of priest, he held the reins and walked slowly backwards, that his eye might not for one moment wander from the divinity he adored.

A magnificent temple was reared for this new deity on the Paatine mount, and he was daily worshiped with oblations and sacrifices, which surpassed all that Rome had yet beheld of idolatrous splendor. Syrian girls of voluptuous beauty danced lasciviously around the altar, while the highest dignitaries of the state and army performed the humblest functions before the shrine. Elagabalus rioting in imperial wealth and power, surrendered himself to the grossest and most disgusting dissoluteness. Bringing the vices and the luxury of the orient to his court, and adding to those all the refinements of enervating and demoralizing pleasure which the occident could suggest, he presented to the world a spectacle of shameless debauchery, which had never before been paralleled.

The palaces of the Cæsars had been already as corrupt as the ingenuity of their possessors could make them. But Elagabalus, transporting to Rome the vices of Asia, had more capacity for the perpetration of deeds of enormous foulness than any of his predecessors possessed. The story of his atrocities can not be told. Modern civilization can not listen to the recital. He dressed boys in the robes of girls and married them. The ingenuity of his court was taxed to subvert every law of nature and of decency. Bad as the world now is, it has made vast strides in the path of improvement since that day. Christianity has indeed, notwithstanding all its corruptions, already wrought a wonderful change.

No court in Europe now would tolerate for a day a Nero or an Elagabalus.

At length even pagan Rome could endure such infamy no longer. The fiendful priest and emperor was smitten down in a sudden fray in the camp, and, with many of his minions, was hewn to pieces. His mutilated corpse was dragged with every expression of contempt through the streets of Rome, and cast into the Tiber. The senate passed a decree consigning his name to eternal infamy. With an universal outburst of approval, posterity has ratified the edict.

The Pretorian guard, in its luxurious suburban encampment, passed the scepter into the hands of Alexander, a cousin of Elagabalus, a modest youth of but seventeen years of age. The sovereign army supposed that it could mold him at its will. The senate, as ever, was pliant as wax. The mother of the unassuming boy was a woman of uncommon character, and with singular sagacity, she for a time guided all his measures. It is said that she was a disciple of the Saviour, and that, instructed by that pure faith, it was her great ambition to cleanse Rome from the pollutions of the preceding reign. She appointed for her son teachers of the most estimable character, and he was instructed in the faith and morals of Christianity. She established an advisory council, consisting of sixteen of the ablest senators. All the minions of Elagabalus were driven from office.

Under the guidance of wise teachers, Alexander Severus, as he is usually called, began to develop a singularly mild and pure character. He seems to have been endowed with an original constitution of soul, which was dove-like and passionless. He was amiable, unsensual, and moderate in all his desires. There was nothing in his nature which responded to ordinary temptations. He was not virtuous through stern resistance to the allurements of vice; he was virtuous because he had apparently no temptation to be otherwise. God had made him so. In the human family there are lambs and there

are tiger's whelps. The fact is undeniable. But whose philosophy or theology can explain the fact? Elagabalus and Alexander were cousins. But temptation glided from the soul of Alexander, as Jeremy Taylor would say, like dew-drops from a duck's neck. And yet, can any philosophy or theology triumph over the common sense declaration that Elagabalus was an infamous wretch, meriting the execration of mankind?

The historians of those days give the following account of the education of this prince, then an emperor. Strange scenes to have been witnessed in a palace of the Cæsars! Alexander rose at an early hour, and in prayer implored divine guidance for the day. He then met his cabinet council, and with great patience devoted several hours to the discussion of affairs of state, and to the redress of private wrongs. A portion of time was then set apart for study, much attention being devoted to the works of Virgil, Plato, Horace, and Cicero. He then entered his gymnasium for bodily exercise, and thus there was developed a muscular system of unusual vigor. After a bath and a slight dinner, he received petitions, and directed replies to letters and memorials, till supper, which, with the Romans, was the principal meal of the day. His table was always spread with great frugality, and usually invited guests, distinguished for learning and virtue, sat down with him. His dress was plain, and all were impressed by his polished manners. For forty years the palaces of the Cæsars had been but a simmering pool of corruption. The first approaches of Christianity thus changed the scene.

But the moment the emperor touched, even with the gentlest hand, the privileges of the soldiers, a cry was heard which resounded through the empire. In a paroxysm of rage the Pretorian guards marched into the city, breathing threatenings and slaughter. For three days, a fierce civil war raged in the streets of Rome. Many houses were burned, multitudes were slain, and the city was menaced with a general

conflagration. Several of the leading friends of the emperor were massacred, and Alexander was compelled to succumb to the military mob; and the soldiers returned, unpunished and triumphant, to their quarters.

The legions in the provinces followed the successful example of the Pretorian guard, and refused to submit to the slightest curtailment of their privileges. This contest with the licentious soldiery embittered the whole of the reign of Alexander.

Thirty-two years before the period of which we now are writing, the emperor Severus, returning from one of his eastern expeditions, halted in Thrace, to celebrate with military games the birth of his son Geta. A gigantic young barbarian came rollicking into the camp, challenging any one to wrestle with him. Sixteen of the stoutest followers of the army he, in succession, laid upon their backs. The next day, as Severus with his suite, on horseback, was galloping over the plain, this agile young barbarian, whose name was Maximin, with the speed of an antelope, placed himself at the side of the emperor, keeping pace with his horse in a long and rapid career; and then, apparently not fatigued in the slightest degree with his race, in a wrestling match threw, one after another, seven of the most powerful soldiers of the army.

The emperor, astonished at these feats, rewarded Maximin with a golden collar, and assigned him an important post in his own retinue. This Maximin was a genuine barbarian, having a Goth for his father, and a woman from the still more savage tribe of the Alani, for his mother. Renowned for strength and bravery, he rose rapidly in the army, until he attained the first military command. He now headed a conspiracy against Alexander. "Why," said he, "should Roman armies be subject to an effeminate Syrian, the slave of his mother, and of the senate. Soldiers should be governed by a soldier, one reared in camps, and one who knows how to distribute among his comrades the treasures of the empire."

An immense army was at this time gathered upon the Rhine, to repel an irruption of the barbarians from Germany. As by a simultaneous movement, the soldiers rose, cut down Alexander, his mother, and all his supporters, and with shouts and clashing weapons, and trumpet peals, in wildest uproar, proclaimed Maximin *Imperator*. Alexander reigned thirteen years, and was murdered on the nineteenth of March, A. D. 235