

Chapter V: Sale Of The Empire To Didius Julianus.--Part II.

Severus, who dreaded neither his arms nor his enchantments, guarded himself from the only danger of secret conspiracy, by the faithful attendance of six hundred chosen men, who never quitted his person or their cuirasses, either by night or by day, during the whole march. Advancing with a steady and rapid course, he passed, without difficulty, the defiles of the Apennine, received into his party the troops and ambassadors sent to retard his progress, and made a short halt at Interamnia, about seventy miles from Rome. His victory was already secure, but the despair of the Praetorians might have rendered it bloody; and Severus had the laudable ambition of ascending the throne without drawing the sword. [35] His emissaries, dispersed in the capital, assured the guards, that provided they would abandon their worthless prince, and the perpetrators of the murder of Pertinax, to the justice of the conqueror, he would no longer consider that melancholy event as the act of the whole body. The faithless Praetorians, whose resistance was supported only by sullen obstinacy, gladly complied with the easy conditions, seized the greatest part of the assassins, and signified to the senate, that they no longer defended the cause of Julian. That assembly, convoked by the consul, unanimously acknowledged Severus as lawful emperor, decreed divine honors to Pertinax, and pronounced a sentence of deposition and death against his unfortunate successor. Julian was conducted into a private apartment of the baths of the palace, and beheaded as a common criminal, after having purchased, with an immense treasure, an anxious and precarious reign of only sixty-six

days. [36] The almost incredible expedition of Severus, who, in so short a space of time, conducted a numerous army from the banks of the Danube to those of the Tyber, proves at once the plenty of provisions produced by agriculture and commerce, the goodness of the roads, the discipline of the legions, and the indolent, subdued temper of the provinces. [37]

[Footnote 35: Victor and Eutropius, viii. 17, mention a combat near the Milvian bridge, the Ponte Molle, unknown to the better and more ancient writers.]

[Footnote 36: Dion, l. lxxiii. p. 1240. Herodian, l. ii. p. 83. Hist. August. p. 63.]

[Footnote 37: From these sixty-six days, we must first deduct sixteen, as Pertinax was murdered on the 28th of March, and Severus most probably elected on the 13th of April, (see Hist. August. p. 65, and Tillemont, Hist. des Empereurs, tom. iii. p. 393, note 7.) We cannot allow less than ten days after his election, to put a numerous army in motion. Forty days remain for this rapid march; and as we may compute about eight hundred miles from Rome to the neighborhood of Vienna, the army of Severus marched twenty miles every day, without halt or intermission.]

The first cares of Severus were bestowed on two measures the one dictated by policy, the other by decency; the revenge, and the honors, due to the memory of Pertinax. Before the new emperor entered Rome, he

issued his commands to the Praetorian guards, directing them to wait his arrival on a large plain near the city, without arms, but in the habits of ceremony, in which they were accustomed to attend their sovereign. He was obeyed by those haughty troops, whose contrition was the effect of their just terrors. A chosen part of the Illyrian army encompassed them with levelled spears. Incapable of flight or resistance, they expected their fate in silent consternation. Severus mounted the tribunal, sternly reproached them with perfidy and cowardice, dismissed them with ignominy from the trust which they had betrayed, despoiled them of their splendid ornaments, and banished them, on pain of death, to the distance of a hundred miles from the capital. During the transaction, another detachment had been sent to seize their arms, occupy their camp, and prevent the hasty consequences of their despair. [38]

[Footnote 38: Dion, l. lxxiv. p. 1241. Herodian, l. ii. p. 84.] The funeral and consecration of Pertinax was next solemnized with every circumstance of sad magnificence. [39] The senate, with a melancholy pleasure, performed the last rites to that excellent prince, whom they had loved, and still regretted. The concern of his successor was probably less sincere; he esteemed the virtues of Pertinax, but those virtues would forever have confined his ambition to a private station. Severus pronounced his funeral oration with studied eloquence, inward satisfaction, and well-acted sorrow; and by this pious regard to his memory, convinced the credulous multitude, that he alone was worthy to supply his place. Sensible, however, that arms, not ceremonies, must assert his claim to the empire, he left Rome at the end of thirty days,

and without suffering himself to be elated by this easy victory,
prepared to encounter his more formidable rivals.

[Footnote 39: Dion, (l. lxxiv. p. 1244,) who assisted at the ceremony as
a senator, gives a most pompous description of it.]

The uncommon abilities and fortune of Severus have induced an elegant
historian to compare him with the first and greatest of the Caesars.

[40] The parallel is, at least, imperfect. Where shall we find, in the
character of Severus, the commanding superiority of soul, the generous
clemency, and the various genius, which could reconcile and unite the
love of pleasure, the thirst of knowledge, and the fire of ambition?

[41] In one instance only, they may be compared, with some degree of
propriety, in the celerity of their motions, and their civil victories.

In less than four years, [42] Severus subdued the riches of the East, and
the valor of the West. He vanquished two competitors of reputation
and ability, and defeated numerous armies, provided with weapons and
discipline equal to his own. In that age, the art of fortification,
and the principles of tactics, were well understood by all the Roman
generals; and the constant superiority of Severus was that of an artist,
who uses the same instruments with more skill and industry than his
rivals. I shall not, however, enter into a minute narrative of these
military operations; but as the two civil wars against Niger and against
Albinus were almost the same in their conduct, event, and consequences,
I shall collect into one point of view the most striking circumstances,
tending to develop the character of the conqueror and the state of the

empire.

[Footnote 40: Herodian, l. iii. p. 112]

[Footnote 41: Though it is not, most assuredly, the intention of Lucan to exalt the character of Caesar, yet the idea he gives of that hero, in the tenth book of the Pharsalia, where he describes him, at the same time, making love to Cleopatra, sustaining a siege against the power of Egypt, and conversing with the sages of the country, is, in reality, the noblest panegyric. * Note: Lord Byron wrote, no doubt, from a reminiscence of that passage--"It is possible to be a very great man, and to be still very inferior to Julius Caesar, the most complete character, so Lord Bacon thought, of all antiquity. Nature seems incapable of such extraordinary combinations as composed his versatile capacity, which was the wonder even of the Romans themselves. The first

general; the only triumphant politician; inferior to none in point of eloquence; comparable to any in the attainments of wisdom, in an age made up of the greatest commanders, statesmen, orators, and philosophers, that ever appeared in the world; an author who composed a perfect specimen of military annals in his travelling carriage; at one time in a controversy with Cato, at another writing a treatise on punning, and collecting a set of good sayings; fighting and making love at the same moment, and willing to abandon both his empire and his mistress for a sight of the fountains of the Nile. Such did Julius Caesar appear to his contemporaries, and to those of the subsequent ages

who were the most inclined to deplore and execrate his fatal genius."

Note 47 to Canto iv. of Childe Harold.--M.]

[Footnote 42: Reckoning from his election, April 13, 193, to the death of Albinus, February 19, 197. See Tillemont's Chronology.]

Falsehood and insincerity, unsuitable as they seem to the dignity of public transactions, offend us with a less degrading idea of meanness, than when they are found in the intercourse of private life. In the latter, they discover a want of courage; in the other, only a defect of power: and, as it is impossible for the most able statesmen to subdue millions of followers and enemies by their own personal strength, the world, under the name of policy, seems to have granted them a very liberal indulgence of craft and dissimulation. Yet the arts of Severus cannot be justified by the most ample privileges of state reason. He promised only to betray, he flattered only to ruin; and however he might occasionally bind himself by oaths and treaties, his conscience, obsequious to his interest, always released him from the inconvenient obligation. [43]

[Footnote 43: Herodian, l. ii. p. 85.]

If his two competitors, reconciled by their common danger, had advanced upon him without delay, perhaps Severus would have sunk under their united effort. Had they even attacked him, at the same time, with separate views and separate armies, the contest might have been long and

doubtful. But they fell, singly and successively, an easy prey to the arts as well as arms of their subtle enemy, lulled into security by the moderation of his professions, and overwhelmed by the rapidity of his action. He first marched against Niger, whose reputation and power he the most dreaded: but he declined any hostile declarations, suppressed the name of his antagonist, and only signified to the senate and people his intention of regulating the eastern provinces. In private, he spoke of Niger, his old friend and intended successor, [44] with the most affectionate regard, and highly applauded his generous design of revenging the murder of Pertinax. To punish the vile usurper of the throne, was the duty of every Roman general. To persevere in arms, and to resist a lawful emperor, acknowledged by the senate, would alone render him criminal. [45] The sons of Niger had fallen into his hands among the children of the provincial governors, detained at Rome as pledges for the loyalty of their parents. [46] As long as the power of Niger inspired terror, or even respect, they were educated with the most tender care, with the children of Severus himself; but they were soon involved in their father's ruin, and removed first by exile, and afterwards by death, from the eye of public compassion. [47]

[Footnote 44: Whilst Severus was very dangerously ill, it was industriously given out, that he intended to appoint Niger and Albinus his successors. As he could not be sincere with respect to both, he might not be so with regard to either. Yet Severus carried his hypocrisy so far, as to profess that intention in the memoirs of his own life.]

[Footnote 45: Hist. August. p. 65.]

[Footnote 46: This practice, invented by Commodus, proved very useful to Severus. He found at Rome the children of many of the principal adherents of his rivals; and he employed them more than once to intimidate, or seduce, the parents.]

[Footnote 47: Herodian, l. iii. p. 95. Hist. August. p. 67, 68.]

Whilst Severus was engaged in his eastern war, he had reason to apprehend that the governor of Britain might pass the sea and the Alps, occupy the vacant seat of empire, and oppose his return with the authority of the senate and the forces of the West. The ambiguous conduct of Albinus, in not assuming the Imperial title, left room for negotiation. Forgetting, at once, his professions of patriotism, and the jealousy of sovereign power, he accepted the precarious rank of Caesar, as a reward for his fatal neutrality. Till the first contest was decided, Severus treated the man, whom he had doomed to destruction, with every mark of esteem and regard. Even in the letter, in which he announced his victory over Niger, he styles Albinus the brother of his soul and empire, sends him the affectionate salutations of his wife Julia, and his young family, and entreats him to preserve the armies and the republic faithful to their common interest. The messengers charged with this letter were instructed to accost the Caesar with respect, to desire a private audience, and to plunge their daggers into his heart.

[48] The conspiracy was discovered, and the too credulous Albinus,

at length, passed over to the continent, and prepared for an unequal contest with his rival, who rushed upon him at the head of a veteran and victorious army.

[Footnote 48: Hist. August. p. 84. Spartianus has inserted this curious letter at full length.]

The military labors of Severus seem inadequate to the importance of his conquests. Two engagements, [481] the one near the Hellespont, the other in the narrow defiles of Cilicia, decided the fate of his Syrian competitor; and the troops of Europe asserted their usual ascendant over the effeminate natives of Asia. [49] The battle of Lyons, where one hundred and fifty thousand Romans [50] were engaged, was equally fatal to Albinus. The valor of the British army maintained, indeed, a sharp and doubtful contest, with the hardy discipline of the Illyrian legions. The fame and person of Severus appeared, during a few moments, irrecoverably lost, till that warlike prince rallied his fainting troops, and led them on to a decisive victory. [51] The war was finished by that memorable day. [511]

[Footnote 481: There were three actions; one near Cyzicus, on the Hellespont, one near Nice, in Bithynia, the third near the Issus, in Cilicia, where Alexander conquered Darius. (Dion, lxiv. c. 6. Herodian, iii. 2, 4.)--W Herodian represents the second battle as of less importance than Dion--M.]

[Footnote 49: Consult the third book of Herodian, and the seventy-fourth book of Dion Cassius.]

[Footnote 50: Dion, l. lxxv. p. 1260.]

[Footnote 51: Dion, l. lxxv. p. 1261. Herodian, l. iii. p. 110. Hist. August. p. 68. The battle was fought in the plain of Trevoux, three or four leagues from Lyons. See Tillemont, tom. iii. p. 406, note 18.]

[Footnote 511: According to Herodian, it was his lieutenant Laetus who led back the troops to the battle, and gained the day, which Severus had almost lost. Dion also attributes to Laetus a great share in the victory. Severus afterwards put him to death, either from fear or jealousy.--W. and G. Wenck and M. Guizot have not given the real statement of Herodian or of Dion. According to the former, Laetus appeared with his own army entire, which he was suspected of having designedly kept disengaged when the battle was still doubtful, or rather after the rout of Severus. Dion says that he did not move till Severus had won the victory.--M.]

The civil wars of modern Europe have been distinguished, not only by the fierce animosity, but likewise by the obstinate perseverance, of the contending factions. They have generally been justified by some principle, or, at least, colored by some pretext, of religion, freedom, or loyalty. The leaders were nobles of independent property and hereditary influence. The troops fought like men interested in the

decision of the quarrel; and as military spirit and party zeal were strongly diffused throughout the whole community, a vanquished chief was immediately supplied with new adherents, eager to shed their blood in the same cause. But the Romans, after the fall of the republic, combated only for the choice of masters. Under the standard of a popular candidate for empire, a few enlisted from affection, some from fear, many from interest, none from principle. The legions, uninflamed by party zeal, were allured into civil war by liberal donatives, and still more liberal promises. A defeat, by disabling the chief from the performance of his engagements, dissolved the mercenary allegiance of his followers, and left them to consult their own safety by a timely desertion of an unsuccessful cause. It was of little moment to the provinces, under whose name they were oppressed or governed; they were driven by the impulsion of the present power, and as soon as that power yielded to a superior force, they hastened to implore the clemency of the conqueror, who, as he had an immense debt to discharge, was obliged to sacrifice the most guilty countries to the avarice of his soldiers. In the vast extent of the Roman empire, there were few fortified cities capable of protecting a routed army; nor was there any person, or family, or order of men, whose natural interest, unsupported by the powers of government, was capable of restoring the cause of a sinking party. [52]

[Footnote 52: Montesquieu, *Considerations sur la Grandeur et la Decadence des Romains*, c. xiii.]

Yet, in the contest between Niger and Severus, a single city deserves an honorable exception. As Byzantium was one of the greatest passages from Europe into Asia, it had been provided with a strong garrison, and a fleet of five hundred vessels was anchored in the harbor. [53] The impetuosity of Severus disappointed this prudent scheme of defence; he left to his generals the siege of Byzantium, forced the less guarded passage of the Hellespont, and, impatient of a meaner enemy, pressed forward to encounter his rival. Byzantium, attacked by a numerous and increasing army, and afterwards by the whole naval power of the empire, sustained a siege of three years, and remained faithful to the name and memory of Niger. The citizens and soldiers (we know not from what cause) were animated with equal fury; several of the principal officers of Niger, who despaired of, or who disdained, a pardon, had thrown themselves into this last refuge: the fortifications were esteemed impregnable, and, in the defence of the place, a celebrated engineer displayed all the mechanic powers known to the ancients. [54] Byzantium, at length, surrendered to famine. The magistrates and soldiers were put to the sword, the walls demolished, the privileges suppressed, and the destined capital of the East subsisted only as an open village, subject to the insulting jurisdiction of Perinthus. The historian Dion, who had admired the flourishing, and lamented the desolate, state of Byzantium, accused the revenge of Severus, for depriving the Roman people of the strongest bulwark against the barbarians of Pontus and Asia [55] The truth of this observation was but too well justified in the succeeding age, when the Gothic fleets covered the Euxine, and passed through the undefined Bosphorus into the centre of the Mediterranean.

[Footnote 53: Most of these, as may be supposed, were small open vessels; some, however, were galleys of two, and a few of three ranks of oars.]

[Footnote 54: The engineer's name was Priscus. His skill saved his life, and he was taken into the service of the conqueror. For the particular facts of the siege, consult Dion Cassius (l. lxxv. p. 1251) and Herodian, (l. iii. p. 95;) for the theory of it, the fanciful chevalier de Folard may be looked into. See Polybe, tom. i. p. 76.]

[Footnote 55: Notwithstanding the authority of Spartianus, and some modern Greeks, we may be assured, from Dion and Herodian, that Byzantium, many years after the death of Severus, lay in ruins. There is no contradiction between the relation of Dion and that of Spartianus and the modern Greeks. Dion does not say that Severus destroyed Byzantium, but that he deprived it of its franchises and privileges, stripped the inhabitants of their property, razed the fortifications, and subjected the city to the jurisdiction of Perinthus. Therefore, when Spartian, Suidas, Cedrenus, say that Severus and his son Antoninus restored to Byzantium its rights and franchises, ordered temples to be built, &c., this is easily reconciled with the relation of Dion. Perhaps the latter mentioned it in some of the fragments of his history which have been lost. As to Herodian, his expressions are evidently exaggerated, and he has been guilty of so many inaccuracies in the history of Severus, that we have a right to suppose one in this passage.--G. from W Wenck and M.

Guizot have omitted to cite Zosimus, who mentions a particular portico built by Severus, and called, apparently, by his name. Zosim. Hist. ii. c. xxx. p. 151, 153, edit Heyne.--M.]

Both Niger and Albinus were discovered and put to death in their flight from the field of battle. Their fate excited neither surprise nor compassion. They had staked their lives against the chance of empire, and suffered what they would have inflicted; nor did Severus claim the arrogant superiority of suffering his rivals to live in a private station. But his unforgiving temper, stimulated by avarice, indulged a spirit of revenge, where there was no room for apprehension. The most considerable of the provincials, who, without any dislike to the fortunate candidate, had obeyed the governor under whose authority they were accidentally placed, were punished by death, exile, and especially by the confiscation of their estates. Many cities of the East were stripped of their ancient honors, and obliged to pay, into the treasury of Severus, four times the amount of the sums contributed by them for the service of Niger. [56]

[Footnote 56: Dion, l. lxxiv. p. 1250.]

Till the final decision of the war, the cruelty of Severus was, in some measure, restrained by the uncertainty of the event, and his pretended reverence for the senate. The head of Albinus, accompanied with a menacing letter, announced to the Romans that he was resolved to spare none of the adherents of his unfortunate competitors. He was irritated

by the just auspicion that he had never possessed the affections of the senate, and he concealed his old malevolence under the recent discovery of some treasonable correspondences. Thirty-five senators, however, accused of having favored the party of Albinus, he freely pardoned, and, by his subsequent behavior, endeavored to convince them, that he had forgotten, as well as forgiven, their supposed offences. But, at the same time, he condemned forty-one [57] other senators, whose names history has recorded; their wives, children, and clients attended them in death, [571] and the noblest provincials of Spain and Gaul were involved in the same ruin. [572] Such rigid justice--for so he termed it--was, in the opinion of Severus, the only conduct capable of insuring peace to the people or stability to the prince; and he condescended slightly to lament, that to be mild, it was necessary that he should first be cruel. [58]

[Footnote 57: Dion, (l. lxxv. p. 1264;) only twenty-nine senators are mentioned by him, but forty-one are named in the Augustan History, p. 69, among whom were six of the name of Pescennius. Herodian (l. iii. p. 115) speaks in general of the cruelties of Severus.]

[Footnote 571: Wenck denies that there is any authority for this massacre of the wives of the senators. He adds, that only the children and relatives of Niger and Albinus were put to death. This is true of the family of Albinus, whose bodies were thrown into the Rhone; those of Niger, according to Lampridius, were sent into exile, but afterwards put to death. Among the partisans of Albinus who were put to death were many

women of rank, multae foeminae illustres. Lamprid. in Sever.--M.]

[Footnote 572: A new fragment of Dion describes the state of Rome during this contest. All pretended to be on the side of Severus; but their secret sentiments were often betrayed by a change of countenance on the arrival of some sudden report. Some were detected by overacting their loyalty, Mai. Fragm. Vatican. p. 227 Severus told the senate he would rather have their hearts than their votes.--Ibid.--M.]

[Footnote 58: Aurelius Victor.]

The true interest of an absolute monarch generally coincides with that of his people. Their numbers, their wealth, their order, and their security, are the best and only foundations of his real greatness; and were he totally devoid of virtue, prudence might supply its place, and would dictate the same rule of conduct. Severus considered the Roman empire as his property, and had no sooner secured the possession, than he bestowed his care on the cultivation and improvement of so valuable an acquisition. Salutary laws, executed with inflexible firmness, soon corrected most of the abuses with which, since the death of Marcus, every part of the government had been infected. In the administration of justice, the judgments of the emperor were characterized by attention, discernment, and impartiality; and whenever he deviated from the strict line of equity, it was generally in favor of the poor and oppressed; not so much indeed from any sense of humanity, as from the natural propensity of a despot to humble the pride of greatness, and to sink

all his subjects to the same common level of absolute dependence. His expensive taste for building, magnificent shows, and above all a constant and liberal distribution of corn and provisions, were the surest means of captivating the affection of the Roman people. [59] The misfortunes of civil discord were obliterated. The clam of peace and prosperity was once more experienced in the provinces; and many cities, restored by the munificence of Severus, assumed the title of his colonies, and attested by public monuments their gratitude and felicity. [60] The fame of the Roman arms was revived by that warlike and successful emperor, [61] and he boasted, with a just pride, that, having received the empire oppressed with foreign and domestic wars, he left it established in profound, universal, and honorable peace. [62]

[Footnote 59: Dion, l. lxxvi. p. 1272. Hist. August. p. 67. Severus celebrated the secular games with extraordinary magnificence, and he left in the public granaries a provision of corn for seven years, at the rate of 75,000 modii, or about 2500 quarters per day. I am persuaded that the granaries of Severus were supplied for a long term, but I am not less persuaded, that policy on one hand, and admiration on the other, magnified the hoard far beyond its true contents.]

[Footnote 60: See Spanheim's treatise of ancient medals, the inscriptions, and our learned travellers Spon and Wheeler, Shaw, Pocock, &c, who, in Africa, Greece, and Asia, have found more monuments of Severus than of any other Roman emperor whatsoever.]

[Footnote 61: He carried his victorious arms to Seleucia and Ctesiphon, the capitals of the Parthian monarchy. I shall have occasion to mention this war in its proper place.]

[Footnote 62: Etiam in Britannis, was his own just and emphatic expression Hist. August. 73.]

Although the wounds of civil war appeared completely healed, its mortal poison still lurked in the vitals of the constitution.

Severus possessed a considerable share of vigor and ability; but the daring soul of the first Caesar, or the deep policy of Augustus, were scarcely equal to the task of curbing the insolence of the victorious legions. By gratitude, by misguided policy, by seeming necessity, Severus was reduced to relax the nerves of discipline. [63] The vanity of his soldiers was flattered with the honor of wearing gold rings their ease was indulged in the permission of living with their wives in the idleness of quarters. He increased their pay beyond the example of former times, and taught them to expect, and soon to claim, extraordinary donatives on every public occasion of danger or festivity. Elated by success, enervated by luxury, and raised above the level of subjects by their dangerous privileges, [64] they soon became incapable of military fatigue, oppressive to the country, and impatient of a just subordination. Their officers asserted the superiority of rank by a more profuse and elegant luxury. There is still extant a letter of Severus, lamenting the licentious stage of the army, [641] and exhorting one of

his generals to begin the necessary reformation from the tribunes themselves; since, as he justly observes, the officer who has forfeited the esteem, will never command the obedience, of his soldiers. [65] Had the emperor pursued the train of reflection, he would have discovered, that the primary cause of this general corruption might be ascribed, not indeed to the example, but to the pernicious indulgence, however, of the commander-in-chief.

[Footnote 63: Herodian, l. iii. p. 115. Hist. August. p. 68.]

[Footnote 64: Upon the insolence and privileges of the soldier, the 16th satire, falsely ascribed to Juvenal, may be consulted; the style and circumstances of it would induce me to believe, that it was composed under the reign of Severus, or that of his son.]

[Footnote 641: Not of the army, but of the troops in Gaul. The contents of this letter seem to prove that Severus was really anxious to restore discipline Herodian is the only historian who accuses him of being the first cause of its relaxation.--G. from W Spartian mentions his increase of the pays.--M.]

[Footnote 65: Hist. August. p. 73.]

The Praetorians, who murdered their emperor and sold the empire, had received the just punishment of their treason; but the necessary, though dangerous, institution of guards was soon restored on a new model by

Severus, and increased to four times the ancient number. [66] Formerly these troops had been recruited in Italy; and as the adjacent provinces gradually imbibed the softer manners of Rome, the levies were extended to Macedonia, Noricum, and Spain. In the room of these elegant troops, better adapted to the pomp of courts than to the uses of war, it was established by Severus, that from all the legions of the frontiers, the soldiers most distinguished for strength, valor, and fidelity, should be occasionally draughted; and promoted, as an honor and reward, into the more eligible service of the guards. [67] By this new institution, the Italian youth were diverted from the exercise of arms, and the capital was terrified by the strange aspect and manners of a multitude of barbarians. But Severus flattered himself, that the legions would consider these chosen Praetorians as the representatives of the whole military order; and that the present aid of fifty thousand men, superior in arms and appointments to any force that could be brought into the field against them, would forever crush the hopes of rebellion, and secure the empire to himself and his posterity.

[Footnote 66: Herodian, l. iii. p. 131.]

[Footnote 67: Dion, l. lxxiv. p. 1243.]

The command of these favored and formidable troops soon became the first office of the empire. As the government degenerated into military despotism, the Praetorian Praefect, who in his origin had been a simple captain of the guards, [671] was placed not only at the head of the

army, but of the finances, and even of the law. In every department of administration, he represented the person, and exercised the authority, of the emperor. The first praefect who enjoyed and abused this immense power was Plautianus, the favorite minister of Severus. His reign lasted above ten years, till the marriage of his daughter with the eldest son of the emperor, which seemed to assure his fortune, proved the occasion of his ruin. [68] The animosities of the palace, by irritating the ambition and alarming the fears of Plautianus, [681] threatened to produce a revolution, and obliged the emperor, who still loved him, to consent with reluctance to his death. [69] After the fall of Plautianus, an eminent lawyer, the celebrated Papinian, was appointed to execute the motley office of Praetorian Praefect.

[Footnote 671: The Praetorian Praefect had never been a simple captain of the guards; from the first creation of this office, under Augustus, it possessed great power. That emperor, therefore, decreed that there should be always two Praetorian Praefects, who could only be taken from the equestrian order. Tiberius first departed from the former clause of this edict; Alexander Severus violated the second by naming senators praefects. It appears that it was under Commodus that the Praetorian Praefects obtained the province of civil jurisdiction. It extended only to Italy, with the exception of Rome and its district, which was governed by the Praefectus urbi. As to the control of the finances, and the levying of taxes, it was not intrusted to them till after the great change that Constantine I. made in the organization of the empire at least, I know no passage which assigns it to them before that time; and

Drakenborch, who has treated this question in his Dissertation de official praefectorum praetorio, vi., does not quote one.--W.]

[Footnote 68: One of his most daring and wanton acts of power, was the castration of a hundred free Romans, some of them married men, and even fathers of families; merely that his daughter, on her marriage with the young emperor, might be attended by a train of eunuchs worthy of an eastern queen. Dion, l. lxxvi. p. 1271.]

[Footnote 681: Plautianus was compatriot, relative, and the old friend, of Severus; he had so completely shut up all access to the emperor, that the latter was ignorant how far he abused his powers: at length, being informed of it, he began to limit his authority. The marriage of Plautilla with Caracalla was unfortunate; and the prince who had been forced to consent to it, menaced the father and the daughter with death when he should come to the throne. It was feared, after that, that Plautianus would avail himself of the power which he still possessed, against the Imperial family; and Severus caused him to be assassinated in his presence, upon the pretext of a conspiracy, which Dion considers fictitious.--W. This note is not, perhaps, very necessary and does not contain the whole facts. Dion considers the conspiracy the invention of Caracalla, by whose command, almost by whose hand, Plautianus was slain in the presence of Severus.--M.]

[Footnote 69: Dion, l. lxxvi. p. 1274.

Herodian, l. iii. p. 122, 129. The grammarian of Alexander seems, as is

not unusual, much better acquainted with this mysterious transaction, and more assured of the guilt of Plautianus than the Roman senator ventures to be.]

Till the reign of Severus, the virtue and even the good sense of the emperors had been distinguished by their zeal or affected reverence for the senate, and by a tender regard to the nice frame of civil policy instituted by Augustus. But the youth of Severus had been trained in the implicit obedience of camps, and his riper years spent in the despotism of military command. His haughty and inflexible spirit could not discover, or would not acknowledge, the advantage of preserving an intermediate power, however imaginary, between the emperor and the army. He disdained to profess himself the servant of an assembly that detested his person and trembled at his frown; he issued his commands, where his requests would have proved as effectual; assumed the conduct and style of a sovereign and a conqueror, and exercised, without disguise, the whole legislative, as well as the executive power.

The victory over the senate was easy and inglorious. Every eye and every passion were directed to the supreme magistrate, who possessed the arms and treasure of the state; whilst the senate, neither elected by the people, nor guarded by military force, nor animated by public spirit, rested its declining authority on the frail and crumbling basis of ancient opinion. The fine theory of a republic insensibly vanished, and made way for the more natural and substantial feelings of monarchy. As the freedom and honors of Rome were successively communicated to the

provinces, in which the old government had been either unknown, or was remembered with abhorrence, the tradition of republican maxims was gradually obliterated. The Greek historians of the age of the Antonines [70] observe, with a malicious pleasure, that although the sovereign of Rome, in compliance with an obsolete prejudice, abstained from the name of king, he possessed the full measure of regal power. In the reign of Severus, the senate was filled with polished and eloquent slaves from the eastern provinces, who justified personal flattery by speculative principles of servitude. These new advocates of prerogative were heard with pleasure by the court, and with patience by the people, when they inculcated the duty of passive obedience, and descanted on the inevitable mischiefs of freedom. The lawyers and historians concurred in teaching, that the Imperial authority was held, not by the delegated commission, but by the irrevocable resignation of the senate; that the emperor was freed from the restraint of civil laws, could command by his arbitrary will the lives and fortunes of his subjects, and might dispose of the empire as of his private patrimony. [71] The most eminent of the civil lawyers, and particularly Papinian, Paulus, and Ulpian, flourished under the house of Severus; and the Roman jurisprudence, having closely united itself with the system of monarchy, was supposed to have attained its full majority and perfection.

[Footnote 70: Appian in Prooem.]

[Footnote 71: Dion Cassius seems to have written with no other view than to form these opinions into an historical system. The Pandea's will

how how assiduously the lawyers, on their side, labored in the cause of prerogative.]

The contemporaries of Severus in the enjoyment of the peace and glory of his reign, forgave the cruelties by which it had been introduced.

Posterity, who experienced the fatal effects of his maxims and example, justly considered him as the principal author of the decline of the Roman empire.