

Chapter VI: Death Of Severus, Tyranny Of Caracalla, Usurpation Of Marcinus.--  
Part II.

The execution of so many innocent citizens was bewailed by the secret tears of their friends and families. The death of Papinian, the Praetorian Praefect, was lamented as a public calamity. [282] During the last seven years of Severus, he had exercised the most important offices of the state, and, by his salutary influence, guided the emperor's steps in the paths of justice and moderation. In full assurance of his virtue and abilities, Severus, on his death-bed, had conjured him to watch over the prosperity and union of the Imperial family. [29] The honest labors of Papinian served only to inflame the hatred which Caracalla had already conceived against his father's minister. After the murder of Geta, the Praefect was commanded to exert the powers of his skill and eloquence in a studied apology for that atrocious deed. The philosophic Seneca had condescended to compose a similar epistle to the senate, in the name of the son and assassin of Agrippina. [30] "That it was easier to commit than to justify a parricide," was the glorious reply of Papinian; [31] who did not hesitate between the loss of life and that of honor. Such intrepid virtue, which had escaped pure and unsullied from the intrigues courts, the habits of business, and the arts of his profession, reflects more lustre on the memory of Papinian, than all his great employments, his numerous writings, and the superior reputation as a lawyer, which he has preserved through every age of the Roman jurisprudence. [32]

[Footnote 281: Papinian was no longer Praetorian Praefect. Caracalla had deprived him of that office immediately after the death of Severus. Such is the statement of Dion; and the testimony of Spartian, who gives Papinian the Praetorian praefecture till his death, is of little weight opposed to that of a senator then living at Rome.--W.]

[Footnote 29: It is said that Papinian was himself a relation of the empress Julia.]

[Footnote 30: Tacit. Annal. xiv. 2.]

[Footnote 31: Hist. August. p. 88.]

[Footnote 32: With regard to Papinian, see Heineccius's *Historia Juris Romani*, l. 330, &c.]

It had hitherto been the peculiar felicity of the Romans, and in the worst of times the consolation, that the virtue of the emperors was active, and their vice indolent. Augustus, Trajan, Hadrian, and Marcus visited their extensive dominions in person, and their progress was marked by acts of wisdom and beneficence. The tyranny of Tiberius, Nero, and Domitian, who resided almost constantly at Rome, or in the adjacent was confined to the senatorial and equestrian orders. [33] But Caracalla was the common enemy of mankind. He left capital (and he never returned to it) about a year after the murder of Geta. The rest of his reign was spent in the several provinces of the empire, particularly those of the

East, and province was by turns the scene of his rapine and cruelty. The senators, compelled by fear to attend his capricious motions, were obliged to provide daily entertainments at an immense expense, which he abandoned with contempt to his guards; and to erect, in every city, magnificent palaces and theatres, which he either disdained to visit, or ordered immediately thrown down. The most wealthy families ruined by partial fines and confiscations, and the great body of his subjects oppressed by ingenious and aggravated taxes. [34] In the midst of peace, and upon the slightest provocation, he issued his commands, at Alexandria, in Egypt for a general massacre. From a secure post in the temple of Serapis, he viewed and directed the slaughter of many thousand citizens, as well as strangers, without distinguishing the number or the crime of the sufferers; since as he coolly informed the senate, all the Alexandrians, those who perished, and those who had escaped, were alike guilty. [35]

[Footnote 33: Tiberius and Domitian never moved from the neighborhood of Rome. Nero made a short journey into Greece. "Et laudatorum Principum usus ex aequo, quamvis procul agentibus. Saevi proximis ingruunt." Tacit. Hist. iv. 74.]

[Footnote 34: Dion, l. lxxvii. p. 1294.]

[Footnote 35: Dion, l. lxxvii. p. 1307. Herodian, l. iv. p. 158.

The former represents it as a cruel massacre, the latter as a perfidious one too. It seems probable that the Alexandrians has irritated the

tyrant by their railleries, and perhaps by their tumults. \* Note: After these massacres, Caracalla also deprived the Alexandrians of their spectacles and public feasts; he divided the city into two parts by a wall with towers at intervals, to prevent the peaceful communications of the citizens. Thus was treated the unhappy Alexandria, says Dion, by the savage beast of Ausonia. This, in fact, was the epithet which the oracle had applied to him; it is said, indeed, that he was much pleased with the name and often boasted of it. Dion, lxxvii. p. 1307.--G.]

The wise instructions of Severus never made any lasting impression on the mind of his son, who, although not destitute of imagination and eloquence, was equally devoid of judgment and humanity. [36] One dangerous maxim, worthy of a tyrant, was remembered and abused by Caracalla. "To secure the affections of the army, and to esteem the rest of his subjects as of little moment." [37] But the liberality of the father had been restrained by prudence, and his indulgence to the troops was tempered by firmness and authority. The careless profusion of the son was the policy of one reign, and the inevitable ruin both of the army and of the empire. The vigor of the soldiers, instead of being confirmed by the severe discipline of camps, melted away in the luxury of cities. The excessive increase of their pay and donatives [38] exhausted the state to enrich the military order, whose modesty in peace, and service in war, is best secured by an honorable poverty. The demeanor of Caracalla was haughty and full of pride; but with the troops he forgot even the proper dignity of his rank, encouraged their insolent familiarity, and, neglecting the essential duties of a general, affected

to imitate the dress and manners of a common soldier.

[Footnote 36: Dion, l. lxxvii. p. 1296.]

[Footnote 37: Dion, l. lxxvi. p. 1284. Mr. Wotton (Hist. of Rome, p. 330) suspects that this maxim was invented by Caracalla himself, and attributed to his father.]

[Footnote 38: Dion (l. lxxviii. p. 1343) informs us that the extraordinary gifts of Caracalla to the army amounted annually to seventy millions of drachmae (about two millions three hundred and fifty thousand pounds.) There is another passage in Dion, concerning the military pay, infinitely curious, were it not obscure, imperfect, and probably corrupt. The best sense seems to be, that the Praetorian guards received twelve hundred and fifty drachmae, (forty pounds a year,) (Dion, l. lxxvii. p. 1307.) Under the reign of Augustus, they were paid at the rate of two drachmae, or denarii, per day, 720 a year, (Tacit. Annal. i. 17.) Domitian, who increased the soldiers' pay one fourth, must have raised the Praetorians to 960 drachmae, (Gronovius de Pecunia Veteri, l. iii. c. 2.) These successive augmentations ruined the empire; for, with the soldiers' pay, their numbers too were increased. We have seen the Praetorians alone increased from 10,000 to 50,000 men. Note: Valois and Reimar have explained in a very simple and probable manner this passage of Dion, which Gibbon seems to me not to have understood. He ordered that the soldiers should receive, as the reward of their services the Praetorians 1250 drachms, the other 5000 drachms. Valois

thinks that the numbers have been transposed, and that Caracalla added 5000 drachms to the donations made to the Praetorians, 1250 to those of the legionaries. The Praetorians, in fact, always received more than the others. The error of Gibbon arose from his considering that this referred to the annual pay of the soldiers, while it relates to the sum they received as a reward for their services on their discharge: donatives means recompense for service. Augustus had settled that the Praetorians, after sixteen campaigns, should receive 5000 drachms: the legionaries received only 3000 after twenty years. Caracalla added 5000 drachms to the donative of the Praetorians, 1250 to that of the legionaries. Gibbon appears to have been mistaken both in confounding this donative on discharge with the annual pay, and in not paying attention to the remark of Valois on the transposition of the numbers in the text.--G]

It was impossible that such a character, and such conduct as that of Caracalla, could inspire either love or esteem; but as long as his vices were beneficial to the armies, he was secure from the danger of rebellion. A secret conspiracy, provoked by his own jealousy, was fatal to the tyrant. The Praetorian praefecture was divided between two ministers. The military department was intrusted to Adventus, an experienced rather than able soldier; and the civil affairs were transacted by Opilius Macrinus, who, by his dexterity in business, had raised himself, with a fair character, to that high office. But his favor varied with the caprice of the emperor, and his life might depend on the slightest suspicion, or the most casual circumstance. Malice or

fanaticism had suggested to an African, deeply skilled in the knowledge of futurity, a very dangerous prediction, that Macrinus and his son were destined to reign over the empire. The report was soon diffused through the province; and when the man was sent in chains to Rome, he still asserted, in the presence of the praefect of the city, the faith of his prophecy. That magistrate, who had received the most pressing instructions to inform himself of the successors of Caracalla, immediately communicated the examination of the African to the Imperial court, which at that time resided in Syria. But, notwithstanding the diligence of the public messengers, a friend of Macrinus found means to apprise him of the approaching danger. The emperor received the letters from Rome; and as he was then engaged in the conduct of a chariot race, he delivered them unopened to the Praetorian Praefect, directing him to despatch the ordinary affairs, and to report the more important business that might be contained in them. Macrinus read his fate, and resolved to prevent it. He inflamed the discontents of some inferior officers, and employed the hand of Martialis, a desperate soldier, who had been refused the rank of centurion. The devotion of Caracalla prompted him to make a pilgrimage from Edessa to the celebrated temple of the Moon at Carrhae. [381] He was attended by a body of cavalry: but having stopped on the road for some necessary occasion, his guards preserved a respectful distance, and Martialis, approaching his person under a pretence of duty, stabbed him with a dagger. The bold assassin was instantly killed by a Scythian archer of the Imperial guard. Such was the end of a monster whose life disgraced human nature, and whose reign accused the patience of the Romans. [39] The grateful soldiers forgot his vices,

remembered only his partial liberality, and obliged the senate to prostitute their own dignity and that of religion, by granting him a place among the gods. Whilst he was upon earth, Alexander the Great was the only hero whom this god deemed worthy his admiration. He assumed the name and ensigns of Alexander, formed a Macedonian phalanx of guards, persecuted the disciples of Aristotle, and displayed, with a puerile enthusiasm, the only sentiment by which he discovered any regard for virtue or glory. We can easily conceive, that after the battle of Narva, and the conquest of Poland, Charles XII. (though he still wanted the more elegant accomplishments of the son of Philip) might boast of having rivalled his valor and magnanimity; but in no one action of his life did Caracalla express the faintest resemblance of the Macedonian hero, except in the murder of a great number of his own and of his father's friends. [40]

[Footnote 381: Carrhae, now Harran, between Edessan and Nisibis, famous for the defeat of Crassus--the Haran from whence Abraham set out for the land of Canaan. This city has always been remarkable for its attachment to Sabaism--G]

[Footnote 39: Dion, l. lxxviii. p. 1312. Herodian, l. iv. p. 168.]

[Footnote 40: The fondness of Caracalla for the name and ensigns of Alexander is still preserved on the medals of that emperor. See Spanheim, de Usu Numismatum, Dissertat. xii. Herodian (l. iv. p. 154) had seen very ridiculous pictures, in which a figure was drawn with one



side of the face like Alexander, and the other like Caracalla.]

After the extinction of the house of Severus, the Roman world remained three days without a master. The choice of the army (for the authority of a distant and feeble senate was little regarded) hung in anxious suspense, as no candidate presented himself whose distinguished birth and merit could engage their attachment and unite their suffrages. The decisive weight of the Praetorian guards elevated the hopes of their praefects, and these powerful ministers began to assert their legal claim to fill the vacancy of the Imperial throne. Adventus, however, the senior praefect, conscious of his age and infirmities, of his small reputation, and his smaller abilities, resigned the dangerous honor to the crafty ambition of his colleague Macrinus, whose well-dissembled grief removed all suspicion of his being accessory to his master's death. [41] The troops neither loved nor esteemed his character. They cast their eyes around in search of a competitor, and at last yielded with reluctance to his promises of unbounded liberality and indulgence. A short time after his accession, he conferred on his son Diadumenianus, at the age of only ten years, the Imperial title, and the popular name of Antoninus. The beautiful figure of the youth, assisted by an additional donative, for which the ceremony furnished a pretext, might attract, it was hoped, the favor of the army, and secure the doubtful throne of Macrinus.

[Footnote 41: Herodian, l. iv. p. 169. Hist. August. p. 94.]

The authority of the new sovereign had been ratified by the cheerful submission of the senate and provinces. They exulted in their unexpected deliverance from a hated tyrant, and it seemed of little consequence to examine into the virtues of the successor of Caracalla. But as soon as the first transports of joy and surprise had subsided, they began to scrutinize the merits of Macrinus with a critical severity, and to arraign the nasty choice of the army. It had hitherto been considered as a fundamental maxim of the constitution, that the emperor must be always chosen in the senate, and the sovereign power, no longer exercised by the whole body, was always delegated to one of its members. But Macrinus was not a senator. [42] The sudden elevation of the Praetorian praefects betrayed the meanness of their origin; and the equestrian order was still in possession of that great office, which commanded with arbitrary sway the lives and fortunes of the senate. A murmur of indignation was heard, that a man, whose obscure [43] extraction had never been illustrated by any signal service, should dare to invest himself with the purple, instead of bestowing it on some distinguished senator, equal in birth and dignity to the splendor of the Imperial station. As soon as the character of Macrinus was surveyed by the sharp eye of discontent, some vices, and many defects, were easily discovered. The choice of his ministers was in many instances justly censured, and the dissatisfied dissatisfied people, with their usual candor, accused at once his indolent tameness and his excessive severity. [44]

[Footnote 42: Dion, l. lxxxviii. p. 1350. Elagabalus reproached his

predecessor with daring to seat himself on the throne; though, as Praetorian praefect, he could not have been admitted into the senate after the voice of the crier had cleared the house. The personal favor of Plautianus and Sejanus had broke through the established rule. They rose, indeed, from the equestrian order; but they preserved the praefecture, with the rank of senator and even with the annulship.]

[Footnote 43: He was a native of Caesarea, in Numidia, and began his fortune by serving in the household of Plautian, from whose ruin he narrowly escaped. His enemies asserted that he was born a slave, and had exercised, among other infamous professions, that of Gladiator. The fashion of aspersing the birth and condition of an adversary seems to have lasted from the time of the Greek orators to the learned grammarians of the last age.]

[Footnote 44: Both Dion and Herodian speak of the virtues and vices of Macrinus with candor and impartiality; but the author of his life, in the Augustan History, seems to have implicitly copied some of the venal writers, employed by Elagabalus, to blacken the memory of his predecessor.]

His rash ambition had climbed a height where it was difficult to stand with firmness, and impossible to fall without instant destruction. Trained in the arts of courts and the forms of civil business, he trembled in the presence of the fierce and undisciplined multitude, over whom he had assumed the command; his military talents were despised, and

his personal courage suspected; a whisper that circulated in the camp, disclosed the fatal secret of the conspiracy against the late emperor, aggravated the guilt of murder by the baseness of hypocrisy, and heightened contempt by detestation. To alienate the soldiers, and to provoke inevitable ruin, the character of a reformer was only wanting; and such was the peculiar hardship of his fate, that Macrinus was compelled to exercise that invidious office. The prodigality of Caracalla had left behind it a long train of ruin and disorder; and if that worthless tyrant had been capable of reflecting on the sure consequences of his own conduct, he would perhaps have enjoyed the dark prospect of the distress and calamities which he bequeathed to his successors.

In the management of this necessary reformation, Macrinus proceeded with a cautious prudence, which would have restored health and vigor to the Roman army in an easy and almost imperceptible manner. To the soldiers already engaged in the service, he was constrained to leave the dangerous privileges and extravagant pay given by Caracalla; but the new recruits were received on the more moderate though liberal establishment of Severus, and gradually formed to modesty and obedience. [45] One fatal error destroyed the salutary effects of this judicious plan. The numerous army, assembled in the East by the late emperor, instead of being immediately dispersed by Macrinus through the several provinces, was suffered to remain united in Syria, during the winter that followed his elevation. In the luxurious idleness of their quarters, the troops viewed their strength and numbers, communicated their complaints,

and revolved in their minds the advantages of another revolution. The veterans, instead of being flattered by the advantageous distinction, were alarmed by the first steps of the emperor, which they considered as the presage of his future intentions. The recruits, with sullen reluctance, entered on a service, whose labors were increased while its rewards were diminished by a covetous and unwarlike sovereign. The murmurs of the army swelled with impunity into seditious clamors; and the partial mutinies betrayed a spirit of discontent and disaffection that waited only for the slightest occasion to break out on every side into a general rebellion. To minds thus disposed, the occasion soon presented itself.

[Footnote 45: Dion, l. lxxxiii. p. 1336. The sense of the author is as the intention of the emperor; but Mr. Wotton has mistaken both, by understanding the distinction, not of veterans and recruits, but of old and new legions. History of Rome, p. 347.]

The empress Julia had experienced all the vicissitudes of fortune. From an humble station she had been raised to greatness, only to taste the superior bitterness of an exalted rank. She was doomed to weep over the death of one of her sons, and over the life of the other. The cruel fate of Caracalla, though her good sense must have long taught' er to expect it, awakened the feelings of a mother and of an empress. Notwithstanding the respectful civility expressed by the usurper towards the widow of Severus, she descended with a painful struggle into the condition of a subject, and soon withdrew herself, by a voluntary death, from the

anxious and humiliating dependence. [46] [461] Julia Maesa, her sister, was ordered to leave the court and Antioch. She retired to Emesa with an immense fortune, the fruit of twenty years' favor accompanied by her two daughters, Soaemias and Mamae, each of whom was a widow, and each had an only son. Bassianus, [462] for that was the name of the son of Soaemias, was consecrated to the honorable ministry of high priest of the Sun; and this holy vocation, embraced either from prudence or superstition, contributed to raise the Syrian youth to the empire of Rome. A numerous body of troops was stationed at Emesa; and as the severe discipline of Macrinus had constrained them to pass the winter encamped, they were eager to revenge the cruelty of such unaccustomed hardships. The soldiers, who resorted in crowds to the temple of the Sun, beheld with veneration and delight the elegant dress and figure of the young pontiff; they recognized, or they thought that they recognized, the features of Caracalla, whose memory they now adored. The artful Maesa saw and cherished their rising partiality, and readily sacrificing her daughter's reputation to the fortune of her grandson, she insinuated that Bassianus was the natural son of their murdered sovereign. The sums distributed by her emissaries with a lavish hand silenced every objection, and the profusion sufficiently proved the affinity, or at least the resemblance, of Bassianus with the great original. The young Antoninus (for he had assumed and polluted that respectable name) was declared emperor by the troops of Emesa, asserted his hereditary right, and called aloud on the armies to follow the standard of a young and liberal prince, who had taken up arms to revenge his father's death and the oppression of the military order. [47]

[Footnote 46: Dion, l. lxxviii. p. 1330. The abridgment of Xiphilin, though less particular, is in this place clearer than the original.]

[Footnote 461: As soon as this princess heard of the death of Caracalla, she wished to starve herself to death: the respect shown to her by Macrinus, in making no change in her attendants or her court, induced her to prolong her life. But it appears, as far as the mutilated text of Dion and the imperfect epitome of Xiphilin permit us to judge, that she conceived projects of ambition, and endeavored to raise herself to the empire. She wished to tread in the steps of Semiramis and Nitocris, whose country bordered on her own. Macrinus sent her an order immediately to leave Antioch, and to retire wherever she chose. She returned to her former purpose, and starved herself to death.--G.]

[Footnote 462: He inherited this name from his great-grandfather of the mother's side, Bassianus, father of Julia Maesa, his grandmother, and of Julia Domna, wife of Severus. Victor (in his epitome) is perhaps the only historian who has given the key to this genealogy, when speaking of Caracalla. His Bassianus ex avi materni nomine dictus. Caracalla, Elagabalus, and Alexander Seyerus, bore successively this name.--G.]

[Footnote 47: According to Lampridius, (Hist. August. p. 135,) Alexander Severus lived twenty-nine years three months and seven days. As he was killed March 19, 235, he was born December 12, 205 and was consequently about this time thirteen years old, as his elder cousin might be about

seventeen. This computation suits much better the history of the young princes than that of Herodian, (l. v. p. 181,) who represents them as three years younger; whilst, by an opposite error of chronology, he lengthens the reign of Elagabalus two years beyond its real duration. For the particulars of the conspiracy, see Dion, l. lxxviii. p. 1339. Herodian, l. v. p. 184.]

Whilst a conspiracy of women and eunuchs was concerted with prudence, and conducted with rapid vigor, Macrinus, who, by a decisive motion, might have crushed his infant enemy, floated between the opposite extremes of terror and security, which alike fixed him inactive at Antioch. A spirit of rebellion diffused itself through all the camps and garrisons of Syria, successive detachments murdered their officers, [48] and joined the party of the rebels; and the tardy restitution of military pay and privileges was imputed to the acknowledged weakness of Macrinus. At length he marched out of Antioch, to meet the increasing and zealous army of the young pretender. His own troops seemed to take the field with faintness and reluctance; but, in the heat of the battle, [49] the Praetorian guards, almost by an involuntary impulse, asserted the superiority of their valor and discipline. The rebel ranks were broken; when the mother and grandmother of the Syrian prince, who, according to their eastern custom, had attended the army, threw themselves from their covered chariots, and, by exciting the compassion of the soldiers, endeavored to animate their drooping courage. Antoninus himself, who, in the rest of his life, never acted like a man, in this important crisis of his fate, approved himself a hero, mounted his



horse, and, at the head of his rallied troops, charged sword in hand among the thickest of the enemy; whilst the eunuch Gannys, [491] whose occupations had been confined to female cares and the soft luxury of Asia, displayed the talents of an able and experienced general. The battle still raged with doubtful violence, and Macrinus might have obtained the victory, had he not betrayed his own cause by a shameful and precipitate flight. His cowardice served only to protract his life a few days, and to stamp deserved ignominy on his misfortunes. It is scarcely necessary to add, that his son Diadumenianus was involved in the same fate.

As soon as the stubborn Praetorians could be convinced that they fought for a prince who had basely deserted them, they surrendered to the conqueror: the contending parties of the Roman army, mingling tears of joy and tenderness, united under the banners of the imagined son of Caracalla, and the East acknowledged with pleasure the first emperor of Asiatic extraction.

[Footnote 48: By a most dangerous proclamation of the pretended Antoninus, every soldier who brought in his officer's head became entitled to his private estate, as well as to his military commission.]

[Footnote 49: Dion, l. lxxviii. p. 1345. Herodian, l. v. p. 186.

The battle was fought near the village of Immae, about two-and-twenty miles from Antioch.]

[Footnote 491: Gannys was not a eunuch. Dion, p. 1355.--W]

The letters of Macrinus had condescended to inform the senate of the slight disturbance occasioned by an impostor in Syria, and a decree immediately passed, declaring the rebel and his family public enemies; with a promise of pardon, however, to such of his deluded adherents as should merit it by an immediate return to their duty. During the twenty days that elapsed from the declaration of the victory of Antoninus, (for in so short an interval was the fate of the Roman world decided,) the capital and the provinces, more especially those of the East, were distracted with hopes and fears, agitated with tumult, and stained with a useless effusion of civil blood, since whosoever of the rivals prevailed in Syria must reign over the empire. The specious letters in which the young conqueror announced his victory to the obedient senate were filled with professions of virtue and moderation; the shining examples of Marcus and Augustus, he should ever consider as the great rule of his administration; and he affected to dwell with pride on the striking resemblance of his own age and fortunes with those of Augustus, who in the earliest youth had revenged, by a successful war, the murder of his father. By adopting the style of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, son of Antoninus and grandson of Severus, he tacitly asserted his hereditary claim to the empire; but, by assuming the tribunitian and proconsular powers before they had been conferred on him by a decree of the senate, he offended the delicacy of Roman prejudice. This new and injudicious violation of the constitution was probably dictated either by the ignorance of his Syrian courtiers, or the fierce disdain of his military

followers. [50]

[Footnote 50: Dion, l. lxxix. p. 1353.]

As the attention of the new emperor was diverted by the most trifling amusements, he wasted many months in his luxurious progress from Syria to Italy, passed at Nicomedia his first winter after his victory, and deferred till the ensuing summer his triumphal entry into the capital. A faithful picture, however, which preceded his arrival, and was placed by his immediate order over the altar of Victory in the senate house, conveyed to the Romans the just but unworthy resemblance of his person and manners. He was drawn in his sacerdotal robes of silk and gold, after the loose flowing fashion of the Medes and Phoenicians; his head was covered with a lofty tiara, his numerous collars and bracelets were adorned with gems of an inestimable value. His eyebrows were tinged with black, and his cheeks painted with an artificial red and white. [51]

The grave senators confessed with a sigh, that, after having long experienced the stern tyranny of their own countrymen, Rome was at length humbled beneath the effeminate luxury of Oriental despotism.

[Footnote 51: Dion, l. lxxix. p. 1363. Herodian, l. v. p. 189.]

The Sun was worshipped at Emesa, under the name of Elagabalus, [52] and under the form of a black conical stone, which, as it was universally believed, had fallen from heaven on that sacred place. To this protecting deity, Antoninus, not without some reason, ascribed his

elevation to the throne. The display of superstitious gratitude was the only serious business of his reign. The triumph of the god of Emesa over all the religions of the earth, was the great object of his zeal and vanity; and the appellation of Elagabalus (for he presumed as pontiff and favorite to adopt that sacred name) was dearer to him than all the titles of Imperial greatness. In a solemn procession through the streets of Rome, the way was strewed with gold dust; the black stone, set in precious gems, was placed on a chariot drawn by six milk-white horses richly caparisoned. The pious emperor held the reins, and, supported by his ministers, moved slowly backwards, that he might perpetually enjoy the felicity of the divine presence. In a magnificent temple raised on the Palatine Mount, the sacrifices of the god Elagabalus were celebrated with every circumstance of cost and solemnity. The richest wines, the most extraordinary victims, and the rarest aromatics, were profusely consumed on his altar. Around the altar, a chorus of Syrian damsels performed their lascivious dances to the sound of barbarian music, whilst the gravest personages of the state and army, clothed in long Phoenician tunics, officiated in the meanest functions, with affected zeal and secret indignation. [53]

[Footnote 52: This name is derived by the learned from two Syrian words, Ela a God, and Gabal, to form, the forming or plastic god, a proper, and even happy epithet for the sun. Wotton's History of Rome, p. 378 Note: The name of Elagabalus has been disfigured in various ways. Herodian calls him; Lampridius, and the more modern writers, make him Heliogabalus. Dion calls him Elegabalus; but Elegabalus was the true

name, as it appears on the medals. (Eckhel. de Doct. num. vet. t. vii. p. 250.) As to its etymology, that which Gibbon adduces is given by Bochart, Chan. ii. 5; but Salmasius, on better grounds. (not. in Lamprid. in Elagab.,) derives the name of Elagabalus from the idol of that god, represented by Herodian and the medals in the form of a mountain, (gibel in Hebrew,) or great stone cut to a point, with marks which represent the sun. As it was not permitted, at Hierapolis, in Syria, to make statues of the sun and moon, because, it was said, they are themselves sufficiently visible, the sun was represented at Emesa in the form of a great stone, which, as it appeared, had fallen from heaven. Spanheim, Caesar. notes, p. 46.--G. The name of Elagabalus, in "nummis rarius legetur." Rasche, Lex. Univ. Ref. Numm. Rasche quotes two.--M]

[Footnote 53: Herodian, l. v. p. 190.]