

Chapter VII: Tyranny Of Maximin, Rebellion, Civil Wars, Death Of Maximin.--Part III.

On his return from the East to Rome, Philip, desirous of obliterating the memory of his crimes, and of captivating the affections of the people, solemnized the secular games with infinite pomp and magnificence. Since their institution or revival by Augustus, [56] they had been celebrated by Claudius, by Domitian, and by Severus, and were now renewed the fifth time, on the accomplishment of the full period of a thousand years from the foundation of Rome. Every circumstance of the secular games was skillfully adapted to inspire the superstitious mind with deep and solemn reverence. The long interval between them [57] exceeded the term of human life; and as none of the spectators had already seen them, none could flatter themselves with the expectation of beholding them a second time. The mystic sacrifices were performed, during three nights, on the banks of the Tyber; and the Campus Martius resounded with music and dances, and was illuminated with innumerable lamps and torches. Slaves and strangers were excluded from any participation in these national ceremonies. A chorus of twenty-seven youths, and as many virgins, of noble families, and whose parents were both alive, implored the propitious gods in favor of the present, and for the hope of the rising generation; requesting, in religious hymns, that according to the faith of their ancient oracles, they would still maintain the virtue, the felicity, and the empire of the Roman people. [58] The magnificence of Philip's shows and entertainments dazzled the eyes of the multitude. The devout were employed in the rites of

superstition, whilst the reflecting few revolved in their anxious minds the past history and the future fate of the empire.[58]

[Footnote 56: The account of the last supposed celebration, though in an enlightened period of history, was so very doubtful and obscure, that the alternative seems not doubtful. When the popish jubilees, the copy of the secular games, were invented by Boniface VII., the crafty pope pretended that he only revived an ancient institution. See M. le Chais, *Lettres sur les Jubiles.*]

[Footnote 57: Either of a hundred or a hundred and ten years. Varro and Livy adopted the former opinion, but the infallible authority of the Sybil consecrated the latter, (*Censorinus de Die Natal. c. 17.*) The emperors Claudius and Philip, however, did not treat the oracle with implicit respect.]

[Footnote 58: The idea of the secular games is best understood from the poem of Horace, and the description of Zosimus, 1. 1. ii. p. 167, &c.]
Since Romulus, with a small band of shepherds and outlaws, fortified himself on the hills near the Tyber, ten centuries had already elapsed. [59] During the four first ages, the Romans, in the laborious school of poverty, had acquired the virtues of war and government: by the vigorous exertion of those virtues, and by the assistance of fortune, they had obtained, in the course of the three succeeding centuries, an absolute empire over many countries of Europe, Asia, and Africa. The last three hundred years had been consumed in apparent prosperity and internal

decline. The nation of soldiers, magistrates, and legislators, who composed the thirty-five tribes of the Roman people, were dissolved into the common mass of mankind, and confounded with the millions of servile provincials, who had received the name, without adopting the spirit, of Romans. A mercenary army, levied among the subjects and barbarians of the frontier, was the only order of men who preserved and abused their independence. By their tumultuary election, a Syrian, a Goth, or an Arab, was exalted to the throne of Rome, and invested with despotic power over the conquests and over the country of the Scipios.

[Footnote 59: The received calculation of Varro assigns to the foundation of Rome an aera that corresponds with the 754th year before Christ. But so little is the chronology of Rome to be depended on, in the more early ages, that Sir Isaac Newton has brought the same event as low as the year 627 (Compare Niebuhr vol. i. p. 271.--M.)]

The limits of the Roman empire still extended from the Western Ocean to the Tigris, and from Mount Atlas to the Rhine and the Danube. To the undiscerning eye of the vulgar, Philip appeared a monarch no less powerful than Hadrian or Augustus had formerly been. The form was still the same, but the animating health and vigor were fled. The industry of the people was discouraged and exhausted by a long series of oppression. The discipline of the legions, which alone, after the extinction of every other virtue, had propped the greatness of the state, was corrupted by the ambition, or relaxed by the weakness, of the emperors. The strength of the frontiers, which had always consisted in arms rather

than in fortifications, was insensibly undermined; and the fairest provinces were left exposed to the rapaciousness or ambition of the barbarians, who soon discovered the decline of the Roman empire.