

## Chapter XIII: Reign Of Diocletian And His Three Associates.--Part I.

The Reign Of Diocletian And His Three Associates, Maximian, Galerius, And Constantius.--General Reestablishment Of Order And Tranquillity.--The Persian War, Victory, And Triumph.--The New Form Of Administration.--Abdication And Retirement Of Diocletian And Maximian.

As the reign of Diocletian was more illustrious than that of any of his predecessors, so was his birth more abject and obscure. The strong claims of merit and of violence had frequently superseded the ideal prerogatives of nobility; but a distinct line of separation was hitherto preserved between the free and the servile part of mankind. The parents of Diocletian had been slaves in the house of Anulinus, a Roman senator; nor was he himself distinguished by any other name than that which he derived from a small town in Dalmatia, from whence his mother deduced her origin. [1] It is, however, probable that his father obtained the freedom of the family, and that he soon acquired an office of scribe, which was commonly exercised by persons of his condition. [2] Favorable oracles, or rather the consciousness of superior merit, prompted his aspiring son to pursue the profession of arms and the hopes of fortune; and it would be extremely curious to observe the gradation of arts and accidents which enabled him in the end to fulfil those oracles, and to display that merit to the world. Diocletian was successively promoted to the government of Maesia, the honors of the consulship, and the important command of the guards of the palace. He distinguished his

abilities in the Persian war; and after the death of Numerian, the slave, by the confession and judgment of his rivals, was declared the most worthy of the Imperial throne. The malice of religious zeal, whilst it arraigns the savage fierceness of his colleague Maximian, has affected to cast suspicions on the personal courage of the emperor Diocletian. [3] It would not be easy to persuade us of the cowardice of a soldier of fortune, who acquired and preserved the esteem of the legions as well as the favor of so many warlike princes. Yet even calumny is sagacious enough to discover and to attack the most vulnerable part. The valor of Diocletian was never found inadequate to his duty, or to the occasion; but he appears not to have possessed the daring and generous spirit of a hero, who courts danger and fame, disdains artifice, and boldly challenges the allegiance of his equals. His abilities were useful rather than splendid; a vigorous mind, improved by the experience and study of mankind; dexterity and application in business; a judicious mixture of liberality and economy, of mildness and rigor; profound dissimulation, under the disguise of military frankness; steadiness to pursue his ends; flexibility to vary his means; and, above all, the great art of submitting his own passions, as well as those of others, to the interest of his ambition, and of coloring his ambition with the most specious pretences of justice and public utility. Like Augustus, Diocletian may be considered as the founder of a new empire. Like the adopted son of Caesar, he was distinguished as a statesman rather than as a warrior; nor did either of those princes employ force, whenever their purpose could be effected by policy.

[Footnote 1: Eutrop. ix. 19. Victor in Epitome. The town seems to have been properly called Doclia, from a small tribe of Illyrians, (see Cellarius, Geograph. Antiqua, tom. i. p. 393;) and the original name of the fortunate slave was probably Docles; he first lengthened it to the Grecian harmony of Diocles, and at length to the Roman majesty of Diocletianus. He likewise assumed the Patrician name of Valerius and it is usually given him by Aurelius Victor.]

[Footnote 2: See Dacier on the sixth satire of the second book of Horace Cornel. Nepos, 'n Vit. Eumen. c. 1.]

[Footnote 3: Lactantius (or whoever was the author of the little treatise De Mortibus Persecutorum) accuses Diocletian of timidity in two places, c. 7. 8. In chap. 9 he says of him, "erat in omni tumultu meticulosu et animi disjectus."]

The victory of Diocletian was remarkable for its singular mildness. A people accustomed to applaud the clemency of the conqueror, if the usual punishments of death, exile, and confiscation, were inflicted with any degree of temper and equity, beheld, with the most pleasing astonishment, a civil war, the flames of which were extinguished in the field of battle. Diocletian received into his confidence Aristobulus, the principal minister of the house of Carus, respected the lives, the fortunes, and the dignity, of his adversaries, and even continued in their respective stations the greater number of the servants of Carinus.

[4] It is not improbable that motives of prudence might assist the

humanity of the artful Dalmatian; of these servants, many had purchased his favor by secret treachery; in others, he esteemed their grateful fidelity to an unfortunate master. The discerning judgment of Aurelian, of Probus, and of Carus, had filled the several departments of the state and army with officers of approved merit, whose removal would have injured the public service, without promoting the interest of his successor. Such a conduct, however, displayed to the Roman world the fairest prospect of the new reign, and the emperor affected to confirm this favorable prepossession, by declaring, that, among all the virtues of his predecessors, he was the most ambitious of imitating the humane philosophy of Marcus Antoninus. [5]

[Footnote 4: In this encomium, Aurelius Victor seems to convey a just, though indirect, censure of the cruelty of Constantius. It appears from the *Fasti*, that Aristobulus remained praefect of the city, and that he ended with Diocletian the consulship which he had commenced with Carinus.]

[Footnote 5: Aurelius Victor styles Diocletian, "Parentum potius quam Dominum." See *Hist. August.* p. 30.]

The first considerable action of his reign seemed to evince his sincerity as well as his moderation. After the example of Marcus, he gave himself a colleague in the person of Maximian, on whom he bestowed at first the title of Caesar, and afterwards that of Augustus. [6] But the motives of his conduct, as well as the object of his choice, were

of a very different nature from those of his admired predecessor. By investing a luxurious youth with the honors of the purple, Marcus had discharged a debt of private gratitude, at the expense, indeed, of the happiness of the state. By associating a friend and a fellow-soldier to the labors of government, Diocletian, in a time of public danger, provided for the defence both of the East and of the West. Maximian was born a peasant, and, like Aurelian, in the territory of Sirmium. Ignorant of letters, [7] careless of laws, the rusticity of his appearance and manners still betrayed in the most elevated fortune the meanness of his extraction. War was the only art which he professed. In a long course of service, he had distinguished himself on every frontier of the empire; and though his military talents were formed to obey rather than to command, though, perhaps, he never attained the skill of a consummate general, he was capable, by his valor, constancy, and experience, of executing the most arduous undertakings. Nor were the vices of Maximian less useful to his benefactor. Insensible to pity, and fearless of consequences, he was the ready instrument of every act of cruelty which the policy of that artful prince might at once suggest and disclaim. As soon as a bloody sacrifice had been offered to prudence or to revenge, Diocletian, by his seasonable intercession, saved the remaining few whom he had never designed to punish, gently censured the severity of his stern colleague, and enjoyed the comparison of a golden and an iron age, which was universally applied to their opposite maxims of government. Notwithstanding the difference of their characters, the two emperors maintained, on the throne, that friendship which they had contracted in a private station. The haughty, turbulent spirit of

Maximian, so fatal, afterwards, to himself and to the public peace, was accustomed to respect the genius of Diocletian, and confessed the ascendant of reason over brutal violence. [8] From a motive either of pride or superstition, the two emperors assumed the titles, the one of Jovius, the other of Herculus. Whilst the motion of the world (such was the language of their venal orators) was maintained by the all-seeing wisdom of Jupiter, the invincible arm of Hercules purged the earth from monsters and tyrants. [9]

[Footnote 6: The question of the time when Maximian received the honors of Caesar and Augustus has divided modern critics, and given occasion to a great deal of learned wrangling. I have followed M. de Tillemont, (*Histoire des Empereurs*, tom. iv. p. 500-505,) who has weighed the several reasons and difficulties with his scrupulous accuracy. \*

Note: Eckbel concurs in this view, viii p. 15.--M.]

[Footnote 7: In an oration delivered before him, (*Panegyri. Vet. ii. 8.*) Mamertinus expresses a doubt, whether his hero, in imitating the conduct of Hannibal and Scipio, had ever heard of their names. From thence we may fairly infer, that Maximian was more desirous of being considered as a soldier than as a man of letters; and it is in this manner that we can often translate the language of flattery into that of truth.]

[Footnote 8: *Lactantius de M. P. c. 8.* Aurelius Victor. As among the Panegyrics, we find orations pronounced in praise of Maximian, and others which flatter his adversaries at his expense, we derive some

knowledge from the contrast.]

[Footnote 9: See the second and third Panegyrics, particularly iii. 3, 10, 14 but it would be tedious to copy the diffuse and affected expressions of their false eloquence. With regard to the titles, consult Aurel. Victor Lactantius de M. P. c. 52. Spanheim de Usu Numismatum, &c. xii 8.]

But even the omnipotence of Jovius and Herculus was insufficient to sustain the weight of the public administration. The prudence of Diocletian discovered that the empire, assailed on every side by the barbarians, required on every side the presence of a great army, and of an emperor. With this view, he resolved once more to divide his unwieldy power, and with the inferior title of Caesars, [901] to confer on two generals of approved merit an unequal share of the sovereign authority. [10] Galerius, surnamed Armentarius, from his original profession of a herdsman, and Constantius, who from his pale complexion had acquired the denomination of Chlorus, [11] were the two persons invested with the second honors of the Imperial purple. In describing the country, extraction, and manners of Herculus, we have already delineated those of Galerius, who was often, and not improperly, styled the younger Maximian, though, in many instances both of virtue and ability, he appears to have possessed a manifest superiority over the elder. The birth of Constantius was less obscure than that of his colleagues. Eutropius, his father, was one of the most considerable nobles of Dardania, and his mother was the niece of the emperor Claudius. [12]

Although the youth of Constantius had been spent in arms, he was endowed with a mild and amiable disposition, and the popular voice had long since acknowledged him worthy of the rank which he at last attained. To strengthen the bonds of political, by those of domestic, union, each of the emperors assumed the character of a father to one of the Caesars, Diocletian to Galerius, and Maximian to Constantius; and each, obliging them to repudiate their former wives, bestowed his daughter in marriage or his adopted son. [13] These four princes distributed among themselves the wide extent of the Roman empire. The defence of Gaul, Spain, [14] and Britain, was intrusted to Constantius: Galerius was stationed on the banks of the Danube, as the safeguard of the Illyrian provinces. Italy and Africa were considered as the department of Maximian; and for his peculiar portion, Diocletian reserved Thrace, Egypt, and the rich countries of Asia. Every one was sovereign with his own jurisdiction; but their united authority extended over the whole monarchy, and each of them was prepared to assist his colleagues with his counsels or presence. The Caesars, in their exalted rank, revered the majesty of the emperors, and the three younger princes invariably acknowledged, by their gratitude and obedience, the common parent of their fortunes. The suspicious jealousy of power found not any place among them; and the singular happiness of their union has been compared to a chorus of music, whose harmony was regulated and maintained by the skilful hand of the first artist. [15]

[Footnote 901: On the relative power of the Augusti and the Caesars, consult a dissertation at the end of Manso's *Leben Constantius des*



Grossen--M.]

[Footnote 10: Aurelius Victor. Victor in Epitome. Eutrop. ix. 22.

Lactant de M. P. c. 8. Hieronym. in Chron.]

[Footnote 11: It is only among the modern Greeks that Tillemont can discover his appellation of Chlorus. Any remarkable degree of paleness seems inconsistent with the rubor mentioned in Panegyric, v. 19.]

[Footnote 12: Julian, the grandson of Constantius, boasts that his family was derived from the warlike Maesians. Misopogon, p. 348. The Dardanians dwelt on the edge of Maesia.]

[Footnote 13: Galerius married Valeria, the daughter of Diocletian; if we speak with strictness, Theodora, the wife of Constantius, was daughter only to the wife of Maximian. Spanheim, Dissertat, xi. 2.]

[Footnote 14: This division agrees with that of the four praefectures; yet there is some reason to doubt whether Spain was not a province of Maximian. See Tillemont, tom. iv. p. 517. \* Note: According to Aurelius Victor and other authorities, Thrace belonged to the division of Galerius. See Tillemont, iv. 36. But the laws of Diocletian are in general dated in Illyria or Thrace.--M.]

[Footnote 15: Julian in Caesarib. p. 315. Spanheim's notes to the French translation, p. 122.]

This important measure was not carried into execution till about six years after the association of Maximian, and that interval of time had not been destitute of memorable incidents. But we have preferred, for the sake of perspicuity, first to describe the more perfect form of Diocletian's government, and afterwards to relate the actions of his reign, following rather the natural order of the events, than the dates of a very doubtful chronology.

The first exploit of Maximian, though it is mentioned in a few words by our imperfect writers, deserves, from its singularity, to be recorded in a history of human manners. He suppressed the peasants of Gaul, who, under the appellation of Bagaudae, [16] had risen in a general insurrection; very similar to those which in the fourteenth century successively afflicted both France and England. [17] It should seem that very many of those institutions, referred by an easy solution to the feudal system, are derived from the Celtic barbarians. When Caesar subdued the Gauls, that great nation was already divided into three orders of men; the clergy, the nobility, and the common people. The first governed by superstition, the second by arms, but the third and last was not of any weight or account in their public councils. It was very natural for the plebeians, oppressed by debt, or apprehensive of injuries, to implore the protection of some powerful chief, who acquired over their persons and property the same absolute right as, among the Greeks and Romans, a master exercised over his slaves. [18] The greatest part of the nation was gradually reduced into a state of servitude;

compelled to perpetual labor on the estates of the Gallic nobles, and confined to the soil, either by the real weight of fetters, or by the no less cruel and forcible restraints of the laws. During the long series of troubles which agitated Gaul, from the reign of Gallienus to that of Diocletian, the condition of these servile peasants was peculiarly miserable; and they experienced at once the complicated tyranny of their masters, of the barbarians, of the soldiers, and of the officers of the revenue. [19]

[Footnote 16: The general name of Bagaudoe (in the signification of rebels) continued till the fifth century in Gaul. Some critics derive it from a Celtic word Bagad, a tumultuous assembly. Scaliger ad Euseb. Du Cange Glossar. (Compare S. Turner, Anglo-Sax. History, i. 214.--M.)]

[Footnote 17: Chronique de Froissart, vol. i. c. 182, ii. 73, 79. The naivete of his story is lost in our best modern writers.]

[Footnote 18: Caesar de Bell. Gallic. vi. 13. Orgetorix, the Helvetian, could arm for his defence a body of ten thousand slaves.]

[Footnote 19: Their oppression and misery are acknowledged by Eumenius (Panegy. vi. 8,) Gallias efferatas injuriis.]

Their patience was at last provoked into despair. On every side they rose in multitudes, armed with rustic weapons, and with irresistible fury. The ploughman became a foot soldier, the shepherd mounted on

horseback, the deserted villages and open towns were abandoned to the flames, and the ravages of the peasants equalled those of the fiercest barbarians. [20] They asserted the natural rights of men, but they asserted those rights with the most savage cruelty. The Gallic nobles, justly dreading their revenge, either took refuge in the fortified cities, or fled from the wild scene of anarchy. The peasants reigned without control; and two of their most daring leaders had the folly and rashness to assume the Imperial ornaments. [21] Their power soon expired at the approach of the legions. The strength of union and discipline obtained an easy victory over a licentious and divided multitude. [22] A severe retaliation was inflicted on the peasants who were found in arms; the affrighted remnant returned to their respective habitations, and their unsuccessful effort for freedom served only to confirm their slavery. So strong and uniform is the current of popular passions, that we might almost venture, from very scanty materials, to relate the particulars of this war; but we are not disposed to believe that the principal leaders, Aelianus and Amandus, were Christians, [23] or to insinuate, that the rebellion, as it happened in the time of Luther, was occasioned by the abuse of those benevolent principles of Christianity, which inculcate the natural freedom of mankind.

[Footnote 20: Panegy. Vet. ii. 4. Aurelius Victor.]

[Footnote 21: Aelianus and Amandus. We have medals coined by them Goltzius in Thes. R. A. p. 117, 121.]

[Footnote 22: *Levibus proeliis domuit. Eutrop. ix. 20.*]

[Footnote 23: The fact rests indeed on very slight authority, a life of St. Babolinus, which is probably of the seventh century. See Duchesne *Scriptores Rer. Francicar. tom. i. p. 662.*]

Maximian had no sooner recovered Gaul from the hands of the peasants, than he lost Britain by the usurpation of Carausius. Ever since the rash but successful enterprise of the Franks under the reign of Probus, their daring countrymen had constructed squadrons of light brigantines, in which they incessantly ravaged the provinces adjacent to the ocean. [24] To repel their desultory incursions, it was found necessary to create a naval power; and the judicious measure was prosecuted with prudence and vigor. Gessoriacum, or Boulogne, in the straits of the British Channel, was chosen by the emperor for the station of the Roman fleet; and the command of it was intrusted to Carausius, a Menapian of the meanest origin, [25] but who had long signalized his skill as a pilot, and his valor as a soldier. The integrity of the new admiral corresponded not with his abilities. When the German pirates sailed from their own harbors, he connived at their passage, but he diligently intercepted their return, and appropriated to his own use an ample share of the spoil which they had acquired. The wealth of Carausius was, on this occasion, very justly considered as an evidence of his guilt; and Maximian had already given orders for his death. But the crafty Menapian foresaw and prevented the severity of the emperor. By his liberality he had attached to his fortunes the fleet which he commanded, and secured

the barbarians in his interest. From the port of Boulogne he sailed over to Britain, persuaded the legion, and the auxiliaries which guarded that island, to embrace his party, and boldly assuming, with the Imperial purple, the title of Augustus defied the justice and the arms of his injured sovereign. [26]

[Footnote 24: Aurelius Victor calls them Germans. Eutropius (ix. 21) gives them the name of Saxons. But Eutropius lived in the ensuing century, and seems to use the language of his own times.]

[Footnote 25: The three expressions of Eutropius, Aurelius Victor, and Eumenius, "vilissime natus," "Bataviae alumnus," and "Menapiae civis," give us a very doubtful account of the birth of Carausius. Dr. Stukely, however, (Hist. of Carausius, p. 62,) chooses to make him a native of St. David's and a prince of the blood royal of Britain. The former idea he had found in Richard of Cirencester, p. 44. \* Note: The Menapians were settled between the Scheldt and the Meuse, in the northern part of Brabant. D'Anville, Geogr. Anc. i. 93.--G.]

[Footnote 26: Panegy. v. 12. Britain at this time was secure, and slightly guarded.]

When Britain was thus dismembered from the empire, its importance was sensibly felt, and its loss sincerely lamented. The Romans celebrated, and perhaps magnified, the extent of that noble island, provided on every side with convenient harbors; the temperature of the climate, and

the fertility of the soil, alike adapted for the production of corn or of vines; the valuable minerals with which it abounded; its rich pastures covered with innumerable flocks, and its woods free from wild beasts or venomous serpents. Above all, they regretted the large amount of the revenue of Britain, whilst they confessed, that such a province well deserved to become the seat of an independent monarchy. [27] During the space of seven years it was possessed by Carausius; and fortune continued propitious to a rebellion supported with courage and ability. The British emperor defended the frontiers of his dominions against the Caledonians of the North, invited, from the continent, a great number of skilful artists, and displayed, on a variety of coins that are still extant, his taste and opulence. Born on the confines of the Franks, he courted the friendship of that formidable people, by the flattering imitation of their dress and manners. The bravest of their youth he enlisted among his land or sea forces; and, in return for their useful alliance, he communicated to the barbarians the dangerous knowledge of military and naval arts. Carausius still preserved the possession of Boulogne and the adjacent country. His fleets rode triumphant in the channel, commanded the mouths of the Seine and of the Rhine, ravaged the coasts of the ocean, and diffused beyond the columns of Hercules the terror of his name. Under his command, Britain, destined in a future age to obtain the empire of the sea, already assumed its natural and respectable station of a maritime power. [28]

[Footnote 27: Panegy. Vet v 11, vii. 9. The orator Eumenius wished to exalt the glory of the hero (Constantius) with the importance of

the conquest. Notwithstanding our laudable partiality for our native country, it is difficult to conceive, that, in the beginning of the fourth century England deserved all these commendations. A century and a half before, it hardly paid its own establishment.]

[Footnote 28: As a great number of medals of Carausius are still preserved, he is become a very favorite object of antiquarian curiosity, and every circumstance of his life and actions has been investigated with sagacious accuracy. Dr. Stukely, in particular, has devoted a large volume to the British emperor. I have used his materials, and rejected most of his fanciful conjectures.]

By seizing the fleet of Boulogne, Carausius had deprived his master of the means of pursuit and revenge. And when, after a vast expense of time and labor, a new armament was launched into the water, [29] the Imperial troops, unaccustomed to that element, were easily baffled and defeated by the veteran sailors of the usurper. This disappointed effort was soon productive of a treaty of peace. Diocletian and his colleague, who justly dreaded the enterprising spirit of Carausius, resigned to him the sovereignty of Britain, and reluctantly admitted their perfidious servant to a participation of the Imperial honors. [30] But the adoption of the two Caesars restored new vigor to the Romans arms; and while the Rhine was guarded by the presence of Maximian, his brave associate Constantius assumed the conduct of the British war. His first enterprise was against the important place of Boulogne. A stupendous mole, raised across the entrance of the harbor, intercepted all hopes of relief. The



town surrendered after an obstinate defence; and a considerable part of the naval strength of Carausius fell into the hands of the besiegers. During the three years which Constantius employed in preparing a fleet adequate to the conquest of Britain, he secured the coast of Gaul, invaded the country of the Franks, and deprived the usurper of the assistance of those powerful allies.

[Footnote 29: When Mamertinus pronounced his first panegyric, the naval preparations of Maximian were completed; and the orator presaged an assured victory. His silence in the second panegyric might alone inform us that the expedition had not succeeded.]

[Footnote 30: Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, and the medals, (*Pax Augg.*) inform us of this temporary reconciliation; though I will not presume (as Dr. Stukely has done, *Medallic History of Carausius*, p. 86, &c) to insert the identical articles of the treaty.]

Before the preparations were finished, Constantius received the intelligence of the tyrant's death, and it was considered as a sure presage of the approaching victory. The servants of Carausius imitated the example of treason which he had given. He was murdered by his first minister, Allectus, and the assassin succeeded to his power and to his danger. But he possessed not equal abilities either to exercise the one or to repel the other.

He beheld, with anxious terror, the opposite shores of the continent

already filled with arms, with troops, and with vessels; for Constantius had very prudently divided his forces, that he might likewise divide the attention and resistance of the enemy. The attack was at length made by the principal squadron, which, under the command of the praefect Asclepiodatus, an officer of distinguished merit, had been assembled in the north of the Seine. So imperfect in those times was the art of navigation, that orators have celebrated the daring courage of the Romans, who ventured to set sail with a side-wind, and on a stormy day. The weather proved favorable to their enterprise. Under the cover of a thick fog, they escaped the fleet of Allectus, which had been stationed off the Isle of Wight to receive them, landed in safety on some part of the western coast, and convinced the Britons, that a superiority of naval strength will not always protect their country from a foreign invasion. Asclepiodatus had no sooner disembarked the imperial troops, then he set fire to his ships; and, as the expedition proved fortunate, his heroic conduct was universally admired. The usurper had posted himself near London, to expect the formidable attack of Constantius, who commanded in person the fleet of Boulogne; but the descent of a new enemy required his immediate presence in the West. He performed this long march in so precipitate a manner, that he encountered the whole force of the praefect with a small body of harassed and disheartened troops. The engagement was soon terminated by the total defeat and death of Allectus; a single battle, as it has often happened, decided the fate of this great island; and when Constantius landed on the shores of Kent, he found them covered with obedient subjects. Their acclamations were loud and unanimous; and the virtues of the conqueror may induce us to

believe, that they sincerely rejoiced in a revolution, which, after a separation of ten years, restored Britain to the body of the Roman empire. [31]

[Footnote 31: With regard to the recovery of Britain, we obtain a few hints from Aurelius Victor and Eutropius.]