

Chapter XXV: Reigns Of Jovian And Valentinian, Division Of The Empire.--Part VII.

The mind of Valentinian, who then resided at Treves, was deeply affected by the calamities of Illyricum; but the lateness of the season suspended the execution of his designs till the ensuing spring. He marched in person, with a considerable part of the forces of Gaul, from the banks of the Moselle: and to the suppliant ambassadors of the Sarmatians, who met him on the way, he returned a doubtful answer, that, as soon as he reached the scene of action, he should examine, and pronounce. When he arrived at Sirmium, he gave audience to the deputies of the Illyrian provinces; who loudly congratulated their own felicity under the auspicious government of Probus, his Praetorian praefect. [151] Valentinian, who was flattered by these demonstrations of their loyalty and gratitude, imprudently asked the deputy of Epirus, a Cynic philosopher of intrepid sincerity, [152] whether he was freely sent by the wishes of the province. "With tears and groans am I sent," replied Iphicles, "by a reluctant people." The emperor paused: but the impunity of his ministers established the pernicious maxim, that they might oppress his subjects, without injuring his service. A strict inquiry into their conduct would have relieved the public discontent. The severe condemnation of the murder of Gabinius, was the only measure which could restore the confidence of the Germans, and vindicate the honor of the Roman name. But the haughty monarch was incapable of the magnanimity which dares to acknowledge a fault. He forgot the provocation, remembered only the injury, and advanced into the country of the Quadi

with an insatiate thirst of blood and revenge. The extreme devastation, and promiscuous massacre, of a savage war, were justified, in the eyes of the emperor, and perhaps in those of the world, by the cruel equity of retaliation: [153] and such was the discipline of the Romans, and the consternation of the enemy, that Valentinian repassed the Danube without the loss of a single man. As he had resolved to complete the destruction of the Quadi by a second campaign, he fixed his winter quarters at Bregetio, on the Danube, near the Hungarian city of Presburg. While the operations of war were suspended by the severity of the weather, the Quadi made an humble attempt to deprecate the wrath of their conqueror; and, at the earnest persuasion of Equitius, their ambassadors were introduced into the Imperial council. They approached the throne with bended bodies and dejected countenances; and without daring to complain of the murder of their king, they affirmed, with solemn oaths, that the late invasion was the crime of some irregular robbers, which the public council of the nation condemned and abhorred. The answer of the emperor left them but little to hope from his clemency or compassion. He reviled, in the most intemperate language, their baseness, their ingratitude, their insolence. His eyes, his voice, his color, his gestures, expressed the violence of his ungoverned fury; and while his whole frame was agitated with convulsive passion, a large blood vessel suddenly burst in his body; and Valentinian fell speechless into the arms of his attendants. Their pious care immediately concealed his situation from the crowd; but, in a few minutes, the emperor of the West expired in an agony of pain, retaining his senses till the last; and struggling, without success, to declare his intentions to the generals

and ministers, who surrounded the royal couch. Valentinian was about fifty-four years of age; and he wanted only one hundred days to accomplish the twelve years of his reign. [154]

[Footnote 151: Ammianus, (xxx. 5,) who acknowledges the merit, has censured, with becoming asperity, the oppressive administration of Petronius Probus. When Jerom translated and continued the Chronicle of Eusebius, (A. D. 380; see Tillemont, Mem. Eccles. tom. xii. p. 53, 626,) he expressed the truth, or at least the public opinion of his country, in the following words: "Probus P. P. Illyrici inquissimus tributorum exactionibus, ante provincias quas regebat, quam a Barbaris vastarentur, erasit." (Chron. edit. Scaliger, p. 187. Animadvers p. 259.) The Saint afterwards formed an intimate and tender friendship with the widow of Probus; and the name of Count Equitius with less propriety, but without much injustice, has been substituted in the text.]

[Footnote 152: Julian (Orat. vi. p. 198) represents his friend Iphicles, as a man of virtue and merit, who had made himself ridiculous and unhappy by adopting the extravagant dress and manners of the Cynics.]

[Footnote 153: Ammian. xxx. v. Jerom, who exaggerates the misfortune of Valentinian, refuses him even this last consolation of revenge. Genitali vastato solo et inultam patriam derelinquens, (tom. i. p. 26.)]

[Footnote 154: See, on the death of Valentinian, Ammianus, (xxx. 6,) Zosimus, (l. iv. p. 221,) Victor, (in Epitom.,) Socrates, (l. iv. c.

31,) and Jerom, (in Chron. p. 187, and tom. i. p. 26, ad Heliodor.)

There is much variety of circumstances among them; and Ammianus is so eloquent, that he writes nonsense.]

The polygamy of Valentinian is seriously attested by an ecclesiastical historian. [155] "The empress Severa (I relate the fable) admitted into her familiar society the lovely Justina, the daughter of an Italian governor: her admiration of those naked charms, which she had often seen in the bath, was expressed with such lavish and imprudent praise, that the emperor was tempted to introduce a second wife into his bed; and his public edict extended to all the subjects of the empire the same domestic privilege which he had assumed for himself." But we may be assured, from the evidence of reason as well as history, that the two marriages of Valentinian, with Severa, and with Justina, were successively contracted; and that he used the ancient permission of divorce, which was still allowed by the laws, though it was condemned by the church Severa was the mother of Gratian, who seemed to unite every claim which could entitle him to the undoubted succession of the Western empire. He was the eldest son of a monarch whose glorious reign had confirmed the free and honorable choice of his fellow-soldiers. Before he had attained the ninth year of his age, the royal youth received from the hands of his indulgent father the purple robe and diadem, with the title of Augustus; the election was solemnly ratified by the consent and applause of the armies of Gaul; [156] and the name of Gratian was added to the names of Valentinian and Valens, in all the legal transactions of the Roman government. By his marriage with the granddaughter of

Constantine, the son of Valentinian acquired all the hereditary rights of the Flavian family; which, in a series of three Imperial generations, were sanctified by time, religion, and the reverence of the people. At the death of his father, the royal youth was in the seventeenth year of his age; and his virtues already justified the favorable opinion of the army and the people. But Gratian resided, without apprehension, in the palace of Treves; whilst, at the distance of many hundred miles, Valentinian suddenly expired in the camp of Bregetio. The passions, which had been so long suppressed by the presence of a master, immediately revived in the Imperial council; and the ambitious design of reigning in the name of an infant, was artfully executed by Mellobaudes and Equitius, who commanded the attachment of the Illyrian and Italian bands. They contrived the most honorable pretences to remove the popular leaders, and the troops of Gaul, who might have asserted the claims of the lawful successor; they suggested the necessity of extinguishing the hopes of foreign and domestic enemies, by a bold and decisive measure. The empress Justina, who had been left in a palace about one hundred miles from Bregetio, was respectively invited to appear in the camp, with the son of the deceased emperor. On the sixth day after the death of Valentinian, the infant prince of the same name, who was only four years old, was shown, in the arms of his mother, to the legions; and solemnly invested, by military acclamation, with the titles and ensigns of supreme power. The impending dangers of a civil war were seasonably prevented by the wise and moderate conduct of the emperor Gratian. He cheerfully accepted the choice of the army; declared that he should always consider the son of Justina as a brother, not as a rival; and

advised the empress, with her son Valentinian to fix their residence at Milan, in the fair and peaceful province of Italy; while he assumed the more arduous command of the countries beyond the Alps. Gratian dissembled his resentment till he could safely punish, or disgrace, the authors of the conspiracy; and though he uniformly behaved with tenderness and regard to his infant colleague, he gradually confounded, in the administration of the Western empire, the office of a guardian with the authority of a sovereign. The government of the Roman world was exercised in the united names of Valens and his two nephews; but the feeble emperor of the East, who succeeded to the rank of his elder brother, never obtained any weight or influence in the councils of the West. [157]

[Footnote 155: Socrates (l. iv. c. 31) is the only original witness of this foolish story, so repugnant to the laws and manners of the Romans, that it scarcely deserved the formal and elaborate dissertation of M. Bonamy, (Mem. de l'Academie, tom. xxx. p. 394-405.) Yet I would preserve the natural circumstance of the bath; instead of following Zosimus who represents Justina as an old woman, the widow of Magnentius.]

[Footnote 156: Ammianus (xxvii. 6) describes the form of this military election, and august investiture. Valentinian does not appear to have consulted, or even informed, the senate of Rome.]

[Footnote 157: Ammianus, xxx. 10. Zosimus, l. iv. p. 222, 223. Tillemont has proved (Hist. des Empereurs, tom. v. p. 707-709) that Gratian

reignea in Italy, Africa, and Illyricum. I have endeavored to express his authority over his brother's dominions, as he used it, in an ambiguous style.]