

Chapter XXIX: Division Of Roman Empire Between Sons Of Theodosius.--Part I.

Final Division Of The Roman Empire Between The Sons Of
Theodosius.--Reign Of Arcadius And Honorius--
Administration Of Rufinus And Stilicho.--Revolt And Defeat
Of Gildo In Africa.

The genius of Rome expired with Theodosius; the last of the successors of Augustus and Constantine, who appeared in the field at the head of their armies, and whose authority was universally acknowledged throughout the whole extent of the empire. The memory of his virtues still continued, however, to protect the feeble and inexperienced youth of his two sons. After the death of their father, Arcadius and Honorius were saluted, by the unanimous consent of mankind, as the lawful emperors of the East, and of the West; and the oath of fidelity was eagerly taken by every order of the state; the senates of old and new Rome, the clergy, the magistrates, the soldiers, and the people. Arcadius, who was then about eighteen years of age, was born in Spain, in the humble habitation of a private family. But he received a princely education in the palace of Constantinople; and his inglorious life was spent in that peaceful and splendid seat of royalty, from whence he appeared to reign over the provinces of Thrace, Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt, from the Lower Danube to the confines of Persia and Æthiopia. His younger brother Honorius, assumed, in the eleventh year of his age, the nominal government of Italy, Africa, Gaul, Spain, and Britain; and the troops, which guarded the frontiers of his kingdom, were opposed, on one

side, to the Caledonians, and on the other, to the Moors. The great and martial præfecture of Illyricum was divided between the two princes: the defence and possession of the provinces of Noricum, Pannonia, and Dalmatia still belonged to the Western empire; but the two large dioceses of Dacia and Macedonia, which Gratian had intrusted to the valor of Theodosius, were forever united to the empire of the East. The boundary in Europe was not very different from the line which now separates the Germans and the Turks; and the respective advantages of territory, riches, populousness, and military strength, were fairly balanced and compensated, in this final and permanent division of the Roman empire. The hereditary sceptre of the sons of Theodosius appeared to be the gift of nature, and of their father; the generals and ministers had been accustomed to adore the majesty of the royal infants; and the army and people were not admonished of their rights, and of their power, by the dangerous example of a recent election. The gradual discovery of the weakness of Arcadius and Honorius, and the repeated calamities of their reign, were not sufficient to obliterate the deep and early impressions of loyalty. The subjects of Rome, who still revered the persons, or rather the names, of their sovereigns, beheld, with equal abhorrence, the rebels who opposed, and the ministers who abused, the authority of the throne.

Theodosius had tarnished the glory of his reign by the elevation of Rufinus; an odious favorite, who, in an age of civil and religious faction, has deserved, from every party, the imputation of every crime. The strong impulse of ambition and avarice had urged Rufinus to abandon

his native country, an obscure corner of Gaul, to advance his fortune in the capital of the East: the talent of bold and ready elocution, qualified him to succeed in the lucrative profession of the law; and his success in that profession was a regular step to the most honorable and important employments of the state. He was raised, by just degrees, to the station of master of the offices. In the exercise of his various functions, so essentially connected with the whole system of civil government, he acquired the confidence of a monarch, who soon discovered his diligence and capacity in business, and who long remained ignorant of the pride, the malice, and the covetousness of his disposition. These vices were concealed beneath the mask of profound dissimulation; his passions were subservient only to the passions of his master; yet in the horrid massacre of Thessalonica, the cruel Rufinus inflamed the fury, without imitating the repentance, of Theodosius. The minister, who viewed with proud indifference the rest of mankind, never forgave the appearance of an injury; and his personal enemies had forfeited, in his opinion, the merit of all public services. Promotus, the master-general of the infantry, had saved the empire from the invasion of the Ostrogoths; but he indignantly supported the preeminence of a rival, whose character and profession he despised; and in the midst of a public council, the impatient soldier was provoked to chastise with a blow the indecent pride of the favorite. This act of violence was represented to the emperor as an insult, which it was incumbent on his dignity to resent. The disgrace and exile of Promotus were signified by a peremptory order, to repair, without delay, to a military station on the banks of the Danube; and the death of that general (though he was slain

in a skirmish with the Barbarians) was imputed to the perfidious arts of Rufinus. The sacrifice of a hero gratified his revenge; the honors of the consulship elated his vanity; but his power was still imperfect and precarious, as long as the important posts of præfect of the East, and of præfect of Constantinople, were filled by Tatian, and his son Proculus; whose united authority balanced, for some time, the ambition and favor of the master of the offices. The two præfects were accused of rapine and corruption in the administration of the laws and finances. For the trial of these illustrious offenders, the emperor constituted a special commission: several judges were named to share the guilt and reproach of injustice; but the right of pronouncing sentence was reserved to the president alone, and that president was Rufinus himself. The father, stripped of the præfecture of the East, was thrown into a dungeon; but the son, conscious that few ministers can be found innocent, where an enemy is their judge, had secretly escaped; and Rufinus must have been satisfied with the least obnoxious victim, if despotism had not condescended to employ the basest and most ungenerous artifice. The prosecution was conducted with an appearance of equity and moderation, which flattered Tatian with the hope of a favorable event: his confidence was fortified by the solemn assurances, and perfidious oaths, of the president, who presumed to interpose the sacred name of Theodosius himself; and the unhappy father was at last persuaded to recall, by a private letter, the fugitive Proculus. He was instantly seized, examined, condemned, and beheaded, in one of the suburbs of Constantinople, with a precipitation which disappointed the clemency of the emperor. Without respecting the misfortunes of a consular senator,

the cruel judges of Tatian compelled him to behold the execution of his son: the fatal cord was fastened round his own neck; but in the moment when he expected and perhaps desired, the relief of a speedy death, he was permitted to consume the miserable remnant of his old age in poverty and exile. The punishment of the two præfects might, perhaps, be excused by the exceptionable parts of their own conduct; the enmity of Rufinus might be palliated by the jealous and unsociable nature of ambition. But he indulged a spirit of revenge equally repugnant to prudence and to justice, when he degraded their native country of Lycia from the rank of Roman provinces; stigmatized a guiltless people with a mark of ignominy; and declared, that the countrymen of Tatian and Proculus should forever remain incapable of holding any employment of honor or advantage under the Imperial government. The new præfect of the East (for Rufinus instantly succeeded to the vacant honors of his adversary) was not diverted, however, by the most criminal pursuits, from the performance of the religious duties, which in that age were considered as the most essential to salvation. In the suburb of Chalcedon, surnamed the Oak, he had built a magnificent villa; to which he devoutly added a stately church, consecrated to the apostles St. Peter and St. Paul, and continually sanctified by the prayers and penance of a regular society of monks. A numerous, and almost general, synod of the bishops of the Eastern empire, was summoned to celebrate, at the same time, the dedication of the church, and the baptism of the founder. This double ceremony was performed with extraordinary pomp; and when Rufinus was purified, in the holy font, from all the sins that he had hitherto committed, a venerable hermit of Egypt rashly proposed himself as the

sponsor of a proud and ambitious statesman.

The character of Theodosius imposed on his minister the task of hypocrisy, which disguised, and sometimes restrained, the abuse of power; and Rufinus was apprehensive of disturbing the indolent slumber of a prince still capable of exerting the abilities and the virtue, which had raised him to the throne. But the absence, and, soon afterwards, the death, of the emperor, confirmed the absolute authority of Rufinus over the person and dominions of Arcadius; a feeble youth, whom the imperious præfect considered as his pupil, rather than his sovereign. Regardless of the public opinion, he indulged his passions without remorse, and without resistance; and his malignant and rapacious spirit rejected every passion that might have contributed to his own glory, or the happiness of the people. His avarice, which seems to have prevailed, in his corrupt mind, over every other sentiment, attracted the wealth of the East, by the various arts of partial and general extortion; oppressive taxes, scandalous bribery, immoderate fines, unjust confiscations, forced or fictitious testaments, by which the tyrant despoiled of their lawful inheritance the children of strangers, or enemies; and the public sale of justice, as well as of favor, which he instituted in the palace of Constantinople. The ambitious candidate eagerly solicited, at the expense of the fairest part of his patrimony, the honors and emoluments of some provincial government; the lives and fortunes of the unhappy people were abandoned to the most liberal purchaser; and the public discontent was sometimes appeased by the sacrifice of an unpopular criminal, whose punishment was profitable only

to the præfect of the East, his accomplice and his judge. If avarice were not the blindest of the human passions, the motives of Rufinus might excite our curiosity; and we might be tempted to inquire with what view he violated every principle of humanity and justice, to accumulate those immense treasures, which he could not spend without folly, nor possess without danger. Perhaps he vainly imagined, that he labored for the interest of an only daughter, on whom he intended to bestow his royal pupil, and the august rank of Empress of the East. Perhaps he deceived himself by the opinion, that his avarice was the instrument of his ambition. He aspired to place his fortune on a secure and independent basis, which should no longer depend on the caprice of the young emperor; yet he neglected to conciliate the hearts of the soldiers and people, by the liberal distribution of those riches, which he had acquired with so much toil, and with so much guilt. The extreme parsimony of Rufinus left him only the reproach and envy of ill-gotten wealth; his dependants served him without attachment; the universal hatred of mankind was repressed only by the influence of servile fear. The fate of Lucian proclaimed to the East, that the præfect, whose industry was much abated in the despatch of ordinary business, was active and indefatigable in the pursuit of revenge. Lucian, the son of the præfect Florentius, the oppressor of Gaul, and the enemy of Julian, had employed a considerable part of his inheritance, the fruit of rapine and corruption, to purchase the friendship of Rufinus, and the high office of Count of the East. But the new magistrate imprudently departed from the maxims of the court, and of the times; disgraced his benefactor by the contrast of a virtuous and temperate administration; and presumed

to refuse an act of injustice, which might have tended to the profit of the emperor's uncle. Arcadius was easily persuaded to resent the supposed insult; and the præfect of the East resolved to execute in person the cruel vengeance, which he meditated against this ungrateful delegate of his power. He performed with incessant speed the journey of seven or eight hundred miles, from Constantinople to Antioch, entered the capital of Syria at the dead of night, and spread universal consternation among a people ignorant of his design, but not ignorant of his character. The Count of the fifteen provinces of the East was dragged, like the vilest malefactor, before the arbitrary tribunal of Rufinus. Notwithstanding the clearest evidence of his integrity, which was not impeached even by the voice of an accuser, Lucian was condemned, almost without a trial, to suffer a cruel and ignominious punishment. The ministers of the tyrant, by the orders, and in the presence, of their master, beat him on the neck with leather thongs armed at the extremities with lead; and when he fainted under the violence of the pain, he was removed in a close litter, to conceal his dying agonies from the eyes of the indignant city. No sooner had Rufinus perpetrated this inhuman act, the sole object of his expedition, than he returned, amidst the deep and silent curses of a trembling people, from Antioch to Constantinople; and his diligence was accelerated by the hope of accomplishing, without delay, the nuptials of his daughter with the emperor of the East.

But Rufinus soon experienced, that a prudent minister should constantly secure his royal captive by the strong, though invisible chain of habit;

and that the merit, and much more easily the favor, of the absent, are obliterated in a short time from the mind of a weak and capricious sovereign. While the præfect satiated his revenge at Antioch, a secret conspiracy of the favorite eunuchs, directed by the great chamberlain Eutropius, undermined his power in the palace of Constantinople. They discovered that Arcadius was not inclined to love the daughter of Rufinus, who had been chosen, without his consent, for his bride; and they contrived to substitute in her place the fair Eudoxia, the daughter of Bauto, a general of the Franks in the service of Rome; and who was educated, since the death of her father, in the family of the sons of Promotus. The young emperor, whose chastity had been strictly guarded by the pious care of his tutor Arsenius, eagerly listened to the artful and flattering descriptions of the charms of Eudoxia: he gazed with impatient ardor on her picture, and he understood the necessity of concealing his amorous designs from the knowledge of a minister who was so deeply interested to oppose the consummation of his happiness. Soon after the return of Rufinus, the approaching ceremony of the royal nuptials was announced to the people of Constantinople, who prepared to celebrate, with false and hollow acclamations, the fortune of his daughter. A splendid train of eunuchs and officers issued, in hymeneal pomp, from the gates of the palace; bearing aloft the diadem, the robes, and the inestimable ornaments, of the future empress. The solemn procession passed through the streets of the city, which were adorned with garlands, and filled with spectators; but when it reached the house of the sons of Promotus, the principal eunuch respectfully entered the mansion, invested the fair Eudoxia with the Imperial robes, and

conducted her in triumph to the palace and bed of Arcadius. The secrecy and success with which this conspiracy against Rufinus had been conducted, imprinted a mark of indelible ridicule on the character of a minister, who had suffered himself to be deceived, in a post where the arts of deceit and dissimulation constitute the most distinguished merit. He considered, with a mixture of indignation and fear, the victory of an aspiring eunuch, who had secretly captivated the favor of his sovereign; and the disgrace of his daughter, whose interest was inseparably connected with his own, wounded the tenderness, or, at least, the pride of Rufinus. At the moment when he flattered himself that he should become the father of a line of kings, a foreign maid, who had been educated in the house of his implacable enemies, was introduced into the Imperial bed; and Eudoxia soon displayed a superiority of sense and spirit, to improve the ascendant which her beauty must acquire over the mind of a fond and youthful husband. The emperor would soon be instructed to hate, to fear, and to destroy the powerful subject, whom he had injured; and the consciousness of guilt deprived Rufinus of every hope, either of safety or comfort, in the retirement of a private life. But he still possessed the most effectual means of defending his dignity, and perhaps of oppressing his enemies. The præfect still exercised an uncontrolled authority over the civil and military government of the East; and his treasures, if he could resolve to use them, might be employed to procure proper instruments for the execution of the blackest designs, that pride, ambition, and revenge could suggest to a desperate statesman. The character of Rufinus seemed to justify the accusations that he conspired against the person of his sovereign, to

seat himself on the vacant throne; and that he had secretly invited the Huns and the Goths to invade the provinces of the empire, and to increase the public confusion. The subtle præfect, whose life had been spent in the intrigues of the palace, opposed, with equal arms, the artful measures of the eunuch Eutropius; but the timid soul of Rufinus was astonished by the hostile approach of a more formidable rival, of the great Stilicho, the general, or rather the master, of the empire of the West.

The celestial gift, which Achilles obtained, and Alexander envied, of a poet worthy to celebrate the actions of heroes has been enjoyed by Stilicho, in a much higher degree than might have been expected from the declining state of genius, and of art. The muse of Claudian, devoted to his service, was always prepared to stigmatize his adversaries, Rufinus, or Eutropius, with eternal infamy; or to paint, in the most splendid colors, the victories and virtues of a powerful benefactor. In the review of a period indifferently supplied with authentic materials, we cannot refuse to illustrate the annals of Honorius, from the invectives, or the panegyrics, of a contemporary writer; but as Claudian appears to have indulged the most ample privilege of a poet and a courtier, some criticism will be requisite to translate the language of fiction or exaggeration, into the truth and simplicity of historic prose. His silence concerning the family of Stilicho may be admitted as a proof, that his patron was neither able, nor desirous, to boast of a long series of illustrious progenitors; and the slight mention of his father, an officer of Barbarian cavalry in the service of Valens, seems to

countenance the assertion, that the general, who so long commanded the armies of Rome, was descended from the savage and perfidious race of the Vandals. If Stilicho had not possessed the external advantages of strength and stature, the most flattering bard, in the presence of so many thousand spectators, would have hesitated to affirm, that he surpassed the measure of the demi-gods of antiquity; and that whenever he moved, with lofty steps, through the streets of the capital, the astonished crowd made room for the stranger, who displayed, in a private condition, the awful majesty of a hero. From his earliest youth he embraced the profession of arms; his prudence and valor were soon distinguished in the field; the horsemen and archers of the East admired his superior dexterity; and in each degree of his military promotions, the public judgment always prevented and approved the choice of the sovereign. He was named, by Theodosius, to ratify a solemn treaty with the monarch of Persia; he supported, during that important embassy, the dignity of the Roman name; and after he return to Constantinople, his merit was rewarded by an intimate and honorable alliance with the Imperial family. Theodosius had been prompted, by a pious motive of fraternal affection, to adopt, for his own, the daughter of his brother Honorius; the beauty and accomplishments of Serena were universally admired by the obsequious court; and Stilicho obtained the preference over a crowd of rivals, who ambitiously disputed the hand of the princess, and the favor of her adopted father. The assurance that the husband of Serena would be faithful to the throne, which he was permitted to approach, engaged the emperor to exalt the fortunes, and to employ the abilities, of the sagacious and intrepid Stilicho. He rose,

through the successive steps of master of the horse, and count of the domestics, to the supreme rank of master-general of all the cavalry and infantry of the Roman, or at least of the Western, empire; and his enemies confessed, that he invariably disdained to barter for gold the rewards of merit, or to defraud the soldiers of the pay and gratifications which they deserved or claimed, from the liberality of the state. The valor and conduct which he afterwards displayed, in the defence of Italy, against the arms of Alaric and Radagaisus, may justify the fame of his early achievements and in an age less attentive to the laws of honor, or of pride, the Roman generals might yield the preeminence of rank, to the ascendant of superior genius. He lamented, and revenged, the murder of Promotus, his rival and his friend; and the massacre of many thousands of the flying Bastarnæ is represented by the poet as a bloody sacrifice, which the Roman Achilles offered to the manes of another Patroclus. The virtues and victories of Stilicho deserved the hatred of Rufinus: and the arts of calumny might have been successful if the tender and vigilant Serena had not protected her husband against his domestic foes, whilst he vanquished in the field the enemies of the empire. Theodosius continued to support an unworthy minister, to whose diligence he delegated the government of the palace, and of the East; but when he marched against the tyrant Eugenius, he associated his faithful general to the labors and glories of the civil war; and in the last moments of his life, the dying monarch recommended to Stilicho the care of his sons, and of the republic. The ambition and the abilities of Stilicho were not unequal to the important trust; and he claimed the guardianship of the two empires, during the minority

of Arcadius and Honorius. The first measure of his administration, or rather of his reign, displayed to the nations the vigor and activity of a spirit worthy to command. He passed the Alps in the depth of winter; descended the stream of the Rhine, from the fortress of Basil to the marshes of Batavia; reviewed the state of the garrisons; repressed the enterprises of the Germans; and, after establishing along the banks a firm and honorable peace, returned, with incredible speed, to the palace of Milan. The person and court of Honorius were subject to the master-general of the West; and the armies and provinces of Europe obeyed, without hesitation, a regular authority, which was exercised in the name of their young sovereign. Two rivals only remained to dispute the claims, and to provoke the vengeance, of Stilicho. Within the limits of Africa, Gildo, the Moor, maintained a proud and dangerous independence; and the minister of Constantinople asserted his equal reign over the emperor, and the empire, of the East.