

## CHAPTER VII

### **The Elevation and Tyranny of Maximin—Rebellion in Africa and Italy Under the Authority of the Senate—Civil Wars and Seditions—Violent Deaths of Maximin and his Son, of Maximus and Balbinus, and of the Three Gordians—Usurpation and Secular Games of Philip**

#### *The Advantages of Hereditary Succession*

Of the various forms of government which have prevailed in the world, a hereditary monarchy seems to present the fairest scope for ridicule. Is it possible to relate, without an indignant smile, that, on the father's decease, the property of a nation, like that of a drove of oxen, descends to his yet-to-be-born infant son? That the bravest warriors and wisest statesmen, relinquishing their natural right to empire, approach the royal cradle on their knees with protestations of inviolable fidelity? Satire and declamation may paint these obvious topics in the most dazzling colors, but our more serious thoughts will respect a useful prejudice, that establishes a rule of succession, independent of the passions of mankind. We shall cheerfully acquiesce in any expedient which deprives the multitude of the dangerous, and indeed the ideal, power of giving themselves a master.

In the cool shade of retirement, we may easily devise imaginary forms of government, in which the scepter shall be constantly bestowed on the most worthy, by the free and incorrupt voice of the whole community. Experience overturns these airy fabrics, and teaches us that, in a large society, the election of a monarch can never devolve to the wisest, or to the most numerous, part of the people. The army is the only order of men sufficiently united to concur in the same sentiments, and powerful enough to impose them on the rest of their fellow-citizens. But the temper of soldiers, habituated at once to violence and to slavery, renders them very unfit guardians of a legal, or even a civil, constitution. Justice, humanity, or political wisdom, are qualities they are too little acquainted with in themselves, to appreciate them in others. Valor will acquire their esteem, and liberality will purchase their votes, but the first of these merits is often lodged in the most savage breasts. The latter can only exert itself at the expense of the public; and both may be turned against the possessor of the throne, by the ambition of a daring rival.

#### *Lack of It In the Roman Empire*

The superior prerogative of birth, when it has obtained the sanction of time and popular opinion, is the plainest and least invidious of all distinctions among mankind. The acknowledged right extinguishes the hopes of faction, and the conscious security disarms the cruelty of the monarch. To the firm establishment of this idea, we owe the peaceful succession, and mild administration, of European monarchies. To the defect of it, we must attribute the frequent civil wars, through which an Asiatic despot is obliged to cut his way to the throne of his fathers. Yet, even in the East, the sphere of contention is usually limited to the princes of the reigning house, and as soon as the more fortunate competitor has removed his brethren, by the sword and the bowstring, he no longer entertains any jealousy of his meaner subjects. But the Roman Empire, after the authority of the senate had sunk into contempt, was a vast scene of confusion. The royal, and even noble, families of the provinces had long since been led in triumph before the car of the haughty republicans. The ancient families of Rome had successively fallen beneath the tyranny of the Caesars. While those princes were shackled by the forms of a commonwealth, and disappointed by the repeated failure of their posterity,<sup>1</sup> it was impossible that

<sup>1</sup> There had been no example of three successive generations on the throne; only three instances of sons who succeeded their fathers. The marriages of the Caesars (notwithstanding the permission, and the frequent practice, of divorces) were

any idea of hereditary succession should have taken root in the minds of their subjects. The right to the throne, which none could claim from birth, every one assumed from merit. The daring hopes of ambition were set loose from the salutary restraints of law and prejudice. The poorest might, without folly, entertain a hope of being raised by valor and fortune to a rank in the army, in which a single crime would enable him to wrest the scepter of the world from his feeble and unpopular master. After the murder of Alexander Severus, and the elevation of Maximin, no emperor could think himself safe upon the throne, and every barbarian peasant of the frontier might aspire to that august but dangerous station.

### *Maximin's Fortunes*

About 32 years before that event, the emperor Severus, returning from an eastern expedition, halted in Thrace, to celebrate, with military games, the birthday of his younger son, Geta. The country flocked in crowds to behold their sovereign, and a young barbarian of gigantic stature earnestly solicited, in his rude dialect, that he might be allowed to contend for the prize of wrestling. As the pride of discipline would have been disgraced in the overthrow of a Roman soldier by a Thracian peasant, he was matched with the most muscular followers of the camp, sixteen of whom he successively laid on the ground. His victory was rewarded by some trifling gifts, and a permission to enlist in the troops. The next day, the happy barbarian was distinguished above a crowd of recruits, dancing and exulting after the fashion of his country. As soon as he perceived that he had attracted the emperor's notice, he instantly ran up to his horse, and followed him on foot, without the least appearance of fatigue, in a long and rapid career. "Thracian," said Severus, with astonishment, "art thou disposed to wrestle after thy race?" "Most willingly, sir," replied the unwearied youth, and, almost in a breath, overthrew seven of the strongest soldiers in the army. A gold collar was the prize of his matchless vigor and activity, and he was immediately appointed to serve in the horse-guards who always attended on the person of the sovereign. (Hist. August. p. 138)

### *Maximin's Military Service*

Maximin—for that was his name—though born on the territories of the empire, descended from a mixed race of barbarians. His father was a Goth, and his mother of the nation of the Alani. He displayed, on every occasion, a valor equal to his strength; and his native fierceness was soon tempered or disguised by the knowledge of the world. Under the reign of Severus and his son, he obtained the rank of centurion, with the favor and esteem of both those princes, the former of who was an excellent judge of merit. Gratitude forbade Maximin to serve under the assassin of Caracalla. Honor taught him to decline the effeminate insults of Elagabalus. On the accession of Alexander he returned to court, and was placed by that prince in a station useful to the service and honorable to himself. The fourth legion, to which he was appointed tribune, soon became, under his care, the best disciplined of the whole army. With the general applause of the soldiers, who bestowed on their favorite hero the names of Ajax and Hercules, he was successively promoted to the first military command.<sup>2</sup> and had not he still retained too much of his savage origin, the emperor might perhaps have given his own sister in marriage to the son of Maximin. (Original letter of Alexander Severus, Hist. August. p. 149)

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generally unfruitful.

<sup>2</sup> Hist. August. p. 140. Herodian, 1. vi. p. 223. Aurelius Victor. By comparing these authors, it should seem that Maximin had the particular command of the Triballian horse, with the general commission of disciplining the recruits of the whole army. His biographer ought to have marked, with more care, his exploits, and the successive steps of his military promotions.

Instead of securing his fidelity, these favors served only to inflame the ambition of the Thracian peasant, who deemed his fortune inadequate to his merit, as long as he was constrained to acknowledge a superior. Though a stranger to real wisdom, he was not devoid of a selfish cunning, which showed him that the emperor had lost the affection of the army, and taught him to improve their discontent to his own advantage. It is easy for conspiracy and lies to shed their poison on the administration of the best of princes, and to accuse even their virtues, by artfully confounding them with those vices to which they bear the nearest affinity. The troops listened with pleasure to the emissaries of Maximin. They blushed at their own ignominious patience, which, for 13 years, had supported the vexatious discipline imposed by an effeminate Syrian, the timid slave of his mother and senate. It was time, they cried, to cast away that useless phantom of the civil power, and to elect for their prince and general a real soldier, educated in camps, exercised in war, who would assert the glory, and distribute among his companions the treasures, of the empire. A great army was at that time assembled on the banks of the Rhine, under the command of the emperor himself, who, almost immediately after his return from the Persian war, had been obliged to march against the barbarians of Germany. The important care of training and reviewing the new levies was entrusted to Maximin. On March 19, AD 235, as he entered the field of exercise, the troops, either from a sudden impulse or a formed conspiracy, saluted him emperor, silenced by their loud acclamations his obstinate refusal, and hastened to consummate their rebellion by the murder of Alexander Severus.

#### *AD 235: Murder of Alexander Severus*

The circumstances of his death are variously related. The writers, who suppose that he died in ignorance of the ingratitude and ambition of Maximin, affirm, that, after partaking of a frugal banquet in the army's sight, he went to bed. About the seventh hour of the day, a part of his own guards broke into the Imperial tent, and with many wounds assassinated their virtuous and unsuspecting prince.<sup>3</sup> If we credit another, and indeed a more probable account, Maximin was invested with the purple by a numerous detachment, several miles distant from the headquarters. He trusted for success rather to the secret wishes than to the public declarations of the great army. Alexander had sufficient time to awaken a faint sense of loyalty among his troops; but their reluctant professions of fidelity quickly vanished on the appearance of Maximin, who declared himself the friend and advocate of the military order, and was unanimously acknowledged emperor of the Romans by the applauding legions. The son of Mamaea, betrayed and deserted, withdrew into his tent, desirous at least to conceal his approaching fate from the insults of the multitude. He was soon followed by a tribune and some centurions, the ministers of death. But instead of receiving with manly resolution the inevitable stroke, his unavailing cries and entreaties disgraced the last moments of his life, and converted into contempt some portion of the just pity which his innocence and misfortunes must inspire. His mother Mamaea, whose pride and avarice he loudly accused as the cause of his ruin, perished with her son. The most faithful of his friends were sacrificed to the first fury of the soldiers. Others were reserved for the more deliberate cruelty of the usurper; and those who experienced the mildest treatment were stripped of their employment, and ignominiously driven from the court and army. (Herodian, l.vi. pp. 223—227)

#### *Maximin's Tyranny*

The former tyrants, Caligula and Nero, Commodus and Caracalla, were all wicked and

<sup>3</sup> Hist. August. p. 135. I have softened some of the most improbable circumstances of this wretched biographer. From this ill-worded narration, it should seem that the prince's buffoon having accidentally entered the tent, and awakened the slumbering monarch, the fear of punishment urged him to persuade the disaffected soldiers to commit the murder.

inexperienced youths,<sup>4</sup> educated in the purple, and corrupted by the pride of empire, the luxury of Rome, and the deceitful voice of flattery. Maximin's cruelty was derived from a different source: a fear of contempt. He depended on the attachment of the soldiers, who loved him for virtues like their own. However, he was painfully aware that his poor, barbarian origin, savage appearance, and total ignorance of the arts and institutions of civil life,<sup>5</sup> formed a very unfavorable contrast with the amiable manners of the unhappy Alexander. He remembered that, in his humbler fortune, he had often waited before the door of the haughty nobles of Rome, and had been denied admittance by the insolence of their slaves. He recollected too the friendship of a few who had relieved his poverty, and assisted his rising hopes. But those who had spurned, and those who had protected the Thracian, were guilty of the same crime, the knowledge of his original obscurity. For this crime many were put to death; and by the execution of several of his benefactors, Maximin published, in words of blood, the indelible history of his baseness and ingratitude.<sup>6</sup>

### *Oppression of the Provinces*

The tyrant's dark and bloodthirsty soul was open to every suspicion against those among his subjects who were the most distinguished by their birth or merit. Whenever he was alarmed with the sound of treason, his cruelty was unbounded and unrelenting. A conspiracy against his life was either discovered or imagined, and Magnus, a consular senator, was named as the principal author of it. Without a witness, trial, or opportunity of defense, Magnus, with 4,000 of his supposed accomplices, were put to death. Italy and the whole empire were infested with innumerable spies and informers. On the slightest accusation, the first of the Roman nobles, who had governed provinces, commanded armies, and been adorned with the consular and triumphal ornaments, were chained to public carriages, and hurried away to the emperor's presence. Confiscation, exile, or simple death, were esteemed uncommon instances of his lenity. Some of the unfortunate sufferers he ordered to be sewed up in the hides of slaughtered animals, others to be exposed to wild beasts, others again to be beaten to death with clubs. During the three years of his reign, he disdained to visit either Rome or Italy. His camp, occasionally removed from the banks of the Rhine to those of the Danube, was the seat of his stern despotism, which trampled on every principle of law and justice, and was supported by the avowed power of the sword.<sup>7</sup> No man of noble birth, elegant accomplishments, or knowledge of civil business, was allowed near him. The court of a Roman emperor revived the idea of those ancient chiefs of slaves and gladiators, whose savage power had left a deep impression of terror and detestation.<sup>8</sup>

As long as Maximin's cruelty was confined to the illustrious senators, or even to the bold adventurers, who in the court or army expose themselves to the caprice of fortune, the body of the people viewed their sufferings with indifference, or perhaps with pleasure. But the tyrant's avarice, stimulated by the insatiate desires of the soldiers, at length attacked the public property. Every city of

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<sup>4</sup> Caligula, the eldest of the four, was only 25 when he ascended the throne; Caracalla was 23, Commodus 19, and Nero no more than 17.

<sup>5</sup> It appears that he was totally ignorant of the Greek language: which, from its universal use in conversation and letters was an essential part of every liberal education.

<sup>6</sup> Hist. August. p. 141. Herodian, 1. vii. p. 237. The latter of these historians have been most unjustly censured for sparing the vices of Maximin.

<sup>7</sup> The wife of Maximin, by insinuating wise counsels with female gentleness, sometimes brought back the tyrant to the way of truth and humanity. See Ammianus Marcellinus, I. xiv. c. 1, where he alludes to the fact which he had more fully related under the reign of the Gordians. We may collect from the medals that Paullina was the name of this benevolent empress; and from the title of Diva that she died before Maximin. (Valesius ad bc. cit. Ammian.) Spanheim de U. et P. N. tom. ii. p. 300.

<sup>8</sup> He was compared to Spartacus and Athenio. Hist. August. p. 141

the empire was possessed of an independent revenue, destined to purchase corn for the multitude, and to pay for games and entertainment. By a single act of authority, the whole mass of wealth was at once confiscated for the use of the Imperial treasury. The temples were stripped of their most valuable offerings of gold and silver, and the statues of gods, heroes, and emperors, were melted down and coined into money. These impious orders could not be executed without tumults and massacres, as in many places the people chose rather to die in the defense of their altars, than to behold in the midst of peace their cities exposed to the rapine and cruelty of war. The soldiers themselves, among whom this sacrilegious plunder was distributed, received it with a blush. Hardened as they were in acts of violence, they dreaded the just reproaches of their friends and relations. Throughout the Roman world a general cry of indignation was heard, imploring vengeance on the common enemy of human kind. At length, by an act of private oppression, a peaceful and unarmed province was driven into rebellion against him. (Herodian, 1. vii. p. 238; Zosim, 1. i. p. 15)

### *AD 237: Revolt in Africa*

The procurator of Africa was a servant worthy of such a master, who considered the fines and confiscation of the rich as one of the most fruitful branches of the Imperial revenue. In April of 237, an iniquitous sentence had been pronounced against some rich youths of that country, the execution of which would have stripped them of far the greater part of their patrimony. In this extremity, a resolution that must either complete or prevent their ruin was dictated by despair. A respite of three days, obtained with difficulty from the rapacious treasurer, was employed in collecting from their estates a great number of slaves and peasants, blindly devoted to the commands of their lords, and armed with the rustic weapons of clubs and axes. The leaders of the Conspiracy, as they were admitted to the audience of the procurator, stabbed him with the daggers concealed under their garments. By assistance from their angry group, seized on the little town of Thysdrus,<sup>9</sup> and erected the standard of rebellion against the sovereign of the Roman Empire. They rested their hopes on the hatred of mankind against Maximin, and they judiciously resolved to oppose that detested tyrant, an emperor whose mild virtues had already acquired the love and esteem of the Romans, and whose authority over the province would give weight and stability to the enterprise. Gordianus, their proconsul, and the object of their choice, refused, with unfeigned reluctance, the dangerous honor, and begged with tears that they would allow him to terminate in peace a long and innocent life, without staining his feeble age with civil blood. Their threats compelled him to accept the Imperial purple, his only refuge indeed against the jealous cruelty of Maximin. According to the reasoning of tyrants, those who have been esteemed worthy of the throne deserve death, and those who deliberate have already rebelled. (Herodian, 1. vii. p. 239; Hist. August. p. 153)

### *Elevation of the Two Gordians*

The family of Gordianus was one of the most illustrious of the Roman senate. On the father's side, he was descended from the Gracchi; on his mother's, from the emperor Trajan. A great estate enabled him to support the dignity of his birth, and, in the enjoyment of it, he displayed an elegant taste, and beneficent disposition. The palace in Rome, formerly inhabited by the great Pompey, had been, during several generations, in the possession of Gordian's family.<sup>10</sup> It was distinguished by ancient trophies of

<sup>9</sup> In the fertile territory of Byzacium, 150 miles south of Carthage. This city was decorated, probably by the Gordians, with the title of colony, and with a fine amphitheater, which is still in a very perfect state, See Itinerary. Wesseling, p. 59, and Shaw's Travels, p. 117.

<sup>10</sup> Hist. Aug. p. 152. The celebrated house of Pompey was usurped by Marc Antony, and consequently became, after the

naval victories, and decorated with the works of modern painting. His villa on the road to Praeneste was celebrated for baths of singular beauty and extent, for three stately rooms of a hundred feet in length, and for a magnificent portico, supported by two hundred columns of the four most curious and costly sorts of marble.<sup>11</sup> The public shows exhibited at his expense, and in which the people were entertained with many hundreds of wild beasts and gladiators,<sup>12</sup> seem to surpass the fortune of a subject. While the liberality of other magistrates was confined to a few solemn festivals in Rome, the magnificence of Gordian was repeated, when he was in charge of those events, every month in the year, and extended, during his consulship, to the principal cities of Italy. He was twice elevated to the last-mentioned dignity, by Caracalla and by Alexander; for he possessed the uncommon talent of acquiring the esteem of virtuous princes without alarming the jealousy of tyrants. His long life was innocently spent in the study of letters and the peaceful honors of Rome. Until he was named proconsul of Africa by the voice of the senate and the approbation of Alexander,<sup>13</sup> he appears prudently to have declined the command of armies and the government of provinces. As long as that emperor lived, Africa was happy under the administration of his worthy representative. After the barbarous Maximin had usurped the throne, Gordianus alleviated the miseries which he was unable to prevent. When he reluctantly accepted the purple, he was more than 80 years old, a last and valuable remains of the happy age of the Antonines, whose virtues he revived in his own conduct and celebrated in an elegant poem of thirty books. With the venerable proconsul, his son, who had accompanied him into Africa as his lieutenant, was likewise declared emperor. His manners were less pure, but his character was equally amiable with that of his father. Twenty-two acknowledged concubines, and a library of sixty-two thousand volumes, attested the variety of his inclinations.<sup>14</sup> The Roman people acknowledged in the features of the younger Gordian the resemblance of Scipio Africanus. They recollected with pleasure that his mother was the granddaughter of Antoninus Pius, and rested the public hope on those latent virtues which hail hitherto, as they fondly imagined, lain concealed in the luxurious indolence of a private life.

### *Senate Ratifies Them*

As soon as the Gordians had appeased the first tumult of a popular election, they removed their court to Carthage, They were received with the acclamations of the Africans, who honored their virtues, and who, since the visit of Hadrian, had never beheld the majesty of a Roman emperor. But these vain acclamations neither strengthened nor confirmed the title of the Gordians. They were induced by principle, as well as interest, to solicit the approbation of the senate. A deputation of the noblest provincials was sent, without delay, to Rome, to relate and justify the conduct of their countrymen, who, having long suffered with patience, were at length resolved to act with vigor. The letters of the new princes were modest and respectful, excusing the necessity which had obliged them to accept the

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Triumvir's death, a part of the Imperial domain. The emperor Trajan allowed and encouraged the rich senators to purchase those magnificent and useless places (Plin. Panegyric. c. 50); and it may seem probable that, on this occasion, Pompey's house came into the possession of Gordian's great-grandfather.

<sup>11</sup> The Claudian, Numidian, Carystian, and Synnadian. The colors of Roman marbles have been faintly described and imperfectly distinguished. It appears, however, that the Carystian was a sea green, and that the marble of Synnada was white mixed with oval spots of purple. Sabmasius ad Hist. August. p. 164.

<sup>12</sup> Hist. August. p. 151, 152. He sometimes gave 500 pair of Gladiators, never less than 150. He once gave for the use of the Circus 100 Sicilian, and as many Cappadocian horses. The animals designed for hunting were chiefly bears, bears, bulls, stags, elks, wild asses, etc. Elephants and lions seem to have been appropriated to Imperial magnificence.

<sup>13</sup> See the original letter, in the Augustan History, p. 152, which at once shows Alexander's respect for the authority of the senate, and his esteem for the proconsul appointed by that assembly.

<sup>14</sup> By each of his concubines, the younger Gordian left three or four children. His literary productions were by no means contemptible. Vol. 1-10

Imperial title; but submitting their election and their fate to the supreme judgment of the senate. (Herodian, l. vii. p. 243; Hist. August. p. 144)

The inclinations of the senate were neither doubtful nor divided. The birth and noble alliances of the Gordians had intimately connected them with the most illustrious houses of Rome. Their fortune had created many dependants in that assembly, their merit had acquired many friends. Their mild administration opened the flattering prospect of the restoration not only of the civil but even of the republican government. The terror of military violence, which had first obliged the senate to forget the murder of Alexander, and to ratify the election of a barbarian peasant,<sup>15</sup> now produced a contrary effect, and provoked them to assert the injured rights of freedom and humanity. The hatred of Maximin toward the senate was declared and implacable; the tamest submission had not appeased his fury, the most cautious innocence would not remove his suspicions. Even the care of their own safety urged them to share the fortune of an enterprise, of which (if unsuccessful) they were sure to be the first victims. These considerations, and perhaps others of a more private nature, were debated in a previous conference of the consuls and the magistrates. As soon as their resolution was decided, they convoked in the temple of Castor the whole body of the senate, according to an ancient form of secrecy,<sup>16</sup> calculated to awaken their attention and to conceal their decrees. Said the consul Syllanus:

Conscript fathers, the two Gordians, both of consular dignity, the one your proconsul, the other your lieutenant, have been declared emperors by the general consent of Africa. Let us return thanks to the youth of Thysdrus; let us return thanks to the faithful people of Carthage, our generous deliverers from a horrid monster!—Why do you hear me thus coolly, thus timidly? Why do you cast those anxious looks on each other? why hesitate? Maximin is a public enemy! may his enmity soon expire with him, and may we long enjoy the prudence and felicity of Gordian the father, the valor and constancy of Gordian the son!<sup>17</sup>

The noble ardor of the consul revived the languid spirit of the senate. By a unanimous decree the election of the Gordians was ratified, Maximin, his son, and his adherents, were pronounced enemies of their country, and liberal rewards were offered to whosoever had the courage and good fortune to destroy them.

During the emperor's absence, a detachment of the Pretorian guards remained at Rome, to protect, or rather to command, the capital. The Prefect Vitalianus had signalized his fidelity to Maximin, by the alacrity with which he had obeyed, and even prevented, the cruel mandates of the tyrant. His death alone could rescue the authority of the senate, and the lives of the senators, from a state of danger and suspense. Before their resolves had transpired, a treasurer and some tribunes were commissioned to take his devoted life. They executed the order with equal boldness and success; and, with their bloody daggers in their hands, ran through the streets, proclaiming to the people and the soldiers the news of the happy revolution. The enthusiasm of liberty was seconded by the promise of a large donation in lands and money. The statues of Maximin were thrown down; the capital of the empire acknowledged, with transport, the authority of the two Gordians and the senate (Herodian, i vii. p. 244), and the example of Rome was followed by the rest of Italy.

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<sup>15</sup> Latin text omitted.

<sup>16</sup> Even the servants of the house, the scribes, etc., were excluded, and their office was filled by the senators themselves. We are obliged to the Augustan History, p. 159, for preserving this curious example of the old discipline of the commonwealth.

<sup>17</sup> This spirited speech, translated from the Augustan historian p. 156, seems transcribed by him from the original registers of the senate.

### *Maximin Assumes Command of Rome and Italy; Prepares for Civil War*

A new spirit had arisen in that assembly, whose long patience had been insulted by wanton despotism and military license. The senate assumed the reins of government, and, with a calm intrepidity, prepared to vindicate by arms the cause of freedom. Among the consular senators recommended by their merit and services to the favor of the emperor Alexander, it was easy to select twenty, not unequal to the command of an army and the conduct of a war. To these was the defense of Italy entrusted. Each was appointee to act in his respective department, authorized to enroll and train the Italian youth; and instructed to fortify the ports and highways, against the impending invasion of Maximin. A number of deputies, chosen from the most illustrious of the senatorial and equestrian orders, were dispatched at the same time to the governors of the several provinces. They earnestly convinced them to fly to the assistance of their country, and to remind the nations of their ancient ties of friendship with the Roman senate and people. The general respect with which these deputies were received, and the zeal of Italy and the provinces in favor of the senate, sufficiently proves that Maximin's subjects were reduced to that uncommon distress, in which the body of the people has more to fear from oppression than from resistance. The consciousness of that melancholy truth inspires a degree of persevering fury seldom to be found in those civil wars which are artificially supported for the benefit of a few factious and designing leaders.<sup>18</sup>

### *AD 237: Defeat and Death of the Two Gordians*

For while the cause of the Gordians was embraced with such diffusive ardor, the Gordians themselves (AD 237, July 3<sup>rd</sup>) were no more. The feeble court of Carthage was alarmed with the rapid approach of Capelianus, governor of Mauritania, who, with a small band of veterans, and a fierce host of barbarians, attacked a faithful but peaceful province. The younger Gordian sallied out to meet the enemy at the head of a few guards and a numerous undisciplined multitude who had been educated in the peaceful luxury of Carthage. His useless valor served only to procure him an honorable death in the field of battle. His aged father, whose reign had not exceeded 36 days, put an end to his life on the first news of the defeat. Carthage, destitute of defense, opened her gates to the conqueror, and Africa was exposed to the rapacious cruelty of a slave, obliged to satisfy his unrelenting master with a large account of blood and treasure.<sup>19</sup>

### *Election of Maximus and Balbinus By the Senate*

The fate of the Gordians filled Rome with just but unexpected terror. The senate, convoked in the temple of Concord, affected to transact the common business of the day; and seemed to decline, with trembling anxiety, the consideration of their own and the public danger. A silent consternation prevailed on the assembly, till a senator, of the name and family of Trajan, awakened his brethren from their fatal lethargy. He represented to them that the choice of cautious dilatory measures had been long since out of their power. Maximin, implacable by nature, and exasperated by injuries, was advancing toward Italy, at the head of the military force of the empire. Their only remaining alternative was either to meet him bravely in the field, or tamely to expect the tortures and ignominious death reserved for

<sup>18</sup> Herodian, I. vii. p. 241, I. viii. p. 277. Hist. August. pp. 156—158.

<sup>19</sup> Herodian, I. vii. p. 254. Hist. August. pp. 150—160. We may observe that 1 month and 6 days, for the reign of Gordian, is a just correction of Casaubon and Panvinius, instead of the absurd reading of 1 year and 6 months. Commentary p. 193. Zosimus relates (L i. p. 11) that the two Gordians perished by a tempest in the midst of their navigation. A strange ignorance of history, or a strange abuse of metaphors.

unsuccessful rebellion. "We have lost," he continued, "two excellent princes. But unless we desert ourselves the hopes of the republic have not perished with the Gordians. Many are the senators whose virtues have deserved, and whose abilities would sustain, the Imperial dignity. Let us elect two emperors, one of whom may conduct the war against the public enemy; while his colleague remains at Rome to direct the civil administration. I cheerfully expose myself to the danger and envy of the nomination, and give my vote in favor of Maximus and Balbinus. Ratify my choice, conscript fathers, or appoint, in their place, others worthier of the empire." The general apprehension silenced the whispers of jealousy; the merit of the candidates was universally acknowledged; and the house resounded with the sincere acclamations of "Long life and victory to the emperors Maximus and Balbinus. You are happy in the judgment of the senate; may the republic be happy under your administration!"<sup>20</sup>

The virtues and the reputation of the new emperors justified the most expectant hopes of the Romans. The various nature of their talents seemed to appropriate to each his peculiar department of peace and war, without leaving room for jealous emulation. Balbinus was an admired orator, a poet of distinguished fame, and a wise magistrate, who had exercised with innocence and applause the civil jurisdiction in almost all the interior provinces of the empire. His birth was noble,<sup>21</sup> his fortune affluent, and his manners liberal and affable. In him, the love of pleasure was corrected by a sense of dignity, nor had the habits of ease deprived him of a capacity for business. The mind of Maximus was formed in a rougher mold. By his valor and abilities he had raised himself from the lowest ranks to the height of the state and army. His victories over the Sarmatians and the Germans, the austerity of his life, and the rigid impartiality of his justice, while he was prefect of the city, commanded the esteem of a people whose affections were engaged in favor of the more amiable Balbinus. The two colleagues had both been consuls (Balbinus had twice enjoyed that honorable office), both had been named among the 20 lieutenants of the senate; and since the one was 60 and the other 74 years old,<sup>22</sup> they had both attained the full maturity of age and experience.

### *Tumult At Rome; the Younger Gordian Is Declared Caesar*

After the senate had conferred on Maximus and Balbinus an equal portion of the consular and tribunal powers, the title of Fathers of their country, and the joint office of Supreme Pontiff, they ascended to the Capitol, to return thanks to the gods, protectors of Rome.<sup>23</sup> The solemn rites of sacrifice were disturbed by a sedition of the people. The licentious multitude neither loved the rigid Maximus, nor did they sufficiently fear the mild and humane Balbinus. Their increasing numbers surrounded the temple of Jupiter. With obstinate clamors they asserted their inherent right of consenting to the election of their sovereign. They demanded, with an apparent moderation, that, besides the two emperors chosen by the senate, a third should be added of the family of the Gordians, as a just return of gratitude

<sup>20</sup> Augustan History, p. 166, from the registers of the senate; the date is admittedly faulty, but the coincidence of the Apollinarian games enables us to correct it.

<sup>21</sup> He was descended from Cornelius Balbus, a noble Spaniard, and the adopted son of Theophanes, the Greek historian. Balbus obtained the freedom of Rome by the favor of Pompey, and preserved it by the eloquence of Cicero (see *Orat. pro Cornel. Balbo*). The friendship of Caesar (to whom he rendered the most important secret services in the civil war) raised him to the consulship and the pontificate, honors never yet possessed by a stranger. The nephew of this Balbus triumphed over the Garamantes. See *Dictionnaire de Bayle, au mot Balbas*, where he distinguishes the several persons of that name, and rectifies, with his usual accuracy, the mistakes of former writers concerning them.

<sup>22</sup> Zonaras, l. xii. p. 622. But little dependence is to be had on the authority of a moderate Greek, so grossly ignorant of the history of the third century, that he creates several imaginary emperors, and confounds those who really existed.

<sup>23</sup> Herodian, i. vii. p. 256, supposes that the senate was at first convoked in the Capitol, and is very eloquent on the occasion. The Augustan History, p. i 16, seems much more authentic.

to those princes who had sacrificed their lives for the republic. At the head of the city guards, and the youth of the equestrian order, Maximus and Balbinus attempted to cut their way through the seditious multitude. The multitude, armed with sticks and stones, drove them back into the Capitol. It is prudent to yield when the contest, whatever may be the issue of it, must be fatal to both parties. A boy, only 13 years of age, the grandson of the elder, and nephew of the younger, Gordian, was produced to the people, invested with the ornaments and title of Caesar. The tumult was appeased by this easy condescension, and the two emperors, as soon as they had been peaceably acknowledged in Rome, prepared to defend Italy against the common enemy.

#### *AD 238: Maximin Marches Into Italy*

While in Rome and Africa revolutions succeeded each other with such amazing rapidity, Maximin's mind was agitated by the most furious passions. He is said to have received the news of the rebellion of the Gordians, and of the decree of the senate against him, not with the temper of a man, but the rage of a wild beast. Since he could not vent his rage on the distant senate, he threatened the life of his son, his friends, and all who ventured to approach his person. The grateful intelligence of the death of the Gordians was quickly followed by the assurance that the senate, laying aside all hopes of pardon or accommodation, had substituted in their room two emperors with whose merit he could not be unacquainted. Revenge was the only consolation left to Maximin, and revenge could only be obtained by arms. The strength of the legions had been assembled by Alexander from all parts of the empire. Three successful campaigns against the Germans and the Sarmatians had raised their fame, confirmed their discipline, and even increased their numbers, by filling the ranks with the flower of the barbarian youth. The life of Maximin had been spent in war, and the candid severity of history cannot refuse him the valor of a soldier, or even the abilities of an experienced general.<sup>24</sup> It might naturally be expected that a prince of such a character should immediately have marched from the banks of the Danube to those of the Tiber instead of suffering the rebellion to gain stability by delay. His victorious army, instigated by contempt for the senate, and eager to gather the spoils of Italy, should have burned with impatience to finish the easy and lucrative conquest. Yet, as far as we can trust to the obscure chronology of that period,<sup>25</sup> it appears that the operations of some foreign war deferred the Italian expedition till the ensuing spring. From the prudent conduct of Maximin, we may learn that the savage features of his character have been exaggerated by the pencil of party. His passions, however impetuous, were submitted to the force of reason. The barbarian possessed something of the generous spirit of Sylla, who subdued the enemies of Rome before he suffered himself to revenge his private injuries.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> In Herodian, I. vii. p. 249, and in the Augustan History, we have three several orations of Maximin to his army, on the rebellion of Africa and Rome: M. de Tillemont has very justly observed that they neither agree with each other, nor with truth. *Histoire des Empereurs*, tom. iii. p. 799.

<sup>25</sup> The carelessness of the writers of that age leaves us in a singular perplexity. 1. We know that Maximus and Balbinus were killed during the Capitoline games. Herodian, I. viii. p. 285. The authority of Censorinus (*de Die Natali*, c. 18) enables us to fix those games with certainty to the year 238, but leaves us in ignorance of the month or day. 2. The election of Gordian by the senate is fixed, with equal certainty, to the 27th of May; but we are at a loss to discover whether it was in the same or the preceding year. Tillemont and Muratori, who maintain the two opposite opinions, bring into the field a desultory troop of authorities, conjectures, and probabilities. The one seems to draw out, the other to contract, the series of events between those periods, more than can Sewell reconcile to reason and history. Yet it is necessary to choose between them.

<sup>26</sup> Velleius Paterculus, I. ii. c. 24. The president de Montesquieu (in his dialogue between Sylla and Eucrates) expresses the sentiments of the dictators in a spirited and even a sublime manner.

## *Siege of Aquileia*

When the troops of Maximin, advancing in excellent order, arrived at the foot of the Julian Alps, they were terrified by the silence and desolation that reigned on the frontiers of Italy. The villages and open towns had been abandoned on their approach by the inhabitants, the cattle were driven away, the provisions removed, or destroyed, the bridges broke down, nor was anything left which could afford either shelter or give subsistence to an invader. Such had been the wise orders of the generals of the senate. Their design was to protract the war, ruin the army of Maximin by the slow operation of famine, and consume his strength in the sieges of the principal cities of Italy, which they had plentifully stored with men and provisions from the deserted country. Aquileia received and withstood the first shock of the invasion. The streams that issue from the head of the Hadriatic Gulf, swelled by the melting of the winter snows,<sup>27</sup> opposed an unexpected obstacle to the arms of Maximin. At length, on a singular bridge, constructed with art and difficulty of large hogsheads, he transported his army to the opposite bank. There, he rooted up the beautiful vineyards in the neighborhood of Aquileia, demolished the suburbs, and employed the timber of the buildings in the engines and towers with which on every side he attacked the city. The walls, fallen to decay during the security of a long peace, had been hastily repaired on this sudden emergency. But the Aquileia's firmest defense consisted in the constancy of the citizens, all ranks of whom, instead of being dismayed, were animated by the extreme danger, and their knowledge of the tyrant's unrelenting temper. Their courage was supported and directed by Crispinus and Menophilus, two of the twenty lieutenants of the senate, who, with a small body of regular troops, had thrown themselves into the besieged place. The army of Maximin was repulsed on repeated attacks, his machines destroyed by showers of artificial fire; and the generous enthusiasm of the Aquileians was exalted into a confidence of success, by the opinion that Belenus, their primary deity, combated in person in the defense of his distressed worshippers.<sup>28</sup>

## *Conduct of Maximus*

The emperor Maximus, who had advanced as far as Ravenna, to secure that important place, and to hasten the military preparations, beheld the event of the war in the more faithful mirror of reason and policy. He was too sensible that a single town could not resist the persevering efforts of a great army; and he dreaded lest the enemy, tired with the obstinate resistance of Aquileia, should on a sudden relinquish the fruitless siege, and march directly toward Rome. The fate of the empire and the cause of freedom must then be committed to the chance of a battle; and what arms could he oppose to the veteran legions of the Rhine and the Danube? Some troops newly levied among the generous but enervated youth of Italy; and a body of German auxiliaries, on whose firmness, in the hour of trial, it was dangerous to depend. In the midst of these just alarms, the stroke of domestic conspiracy punished the crimes of Maximin, and delivered Rome and the senate from the calamities that would surely have attended the victory of an enraged barbarian.

<sup>27</sup> Muratori (*Annali d'Italia*, tom. ii. p. 294) thinks the melting of the snows suits better with the months of June or July than with that of February. The opinion of a man who passed his life between the Alps and the Apennines is undoubtedly of great weight; yet I observe: 1. That the long winter, of which Muratori takes advantage, is to be found only in the Latin version, and not in the Greek text of Herodian. 2. That the vicissitude of suns and rains, to which the soldiers of Maximin were exposed (*Herodian*, 1. viii. p. 277), denotes the spring rather than the summer. We may observe, likewise, that these several streams, as they melted into one, composed the Timavus, so poetically (in every sense of the word) described by Virgil. They are about twelve miles to the east of Aquileia. See Cluver. *Italia Antiqua*, tom. i. p. 189, etc.

<sup>28</sup> Herodian, 1. viii. p. 272. The Celtic deity was supposed to be Apollo, and received under that name the thanks of the senate. A temple was likewise built to Venus the bald, in honor of the women of Aquileia, who had given up their hair to make ropes for the military engines.

### *Murder of Maximin and His Son*

The people of Aquileia had scarcely experienced any of the common miseries of a siege, their magazines were plentifully supplied, and several fountains within the walls assured them of an inexhaustible resource of fresh water. The soldiers of Maximin were, on the contrary, exposed to the inclemency of the season, the contagion of disease, and the horrors of famine. The open country was ruined, the rivers filled with the slain, and polluted with blood. A spirit of despair and disaffection began to diffuse itself among the troops. As they were cut off from all intelligence, they easily believed that the whole empire had embraced the cause of the senate, and that they were left as devoted victims to perish under the impregnable walls of Aquileia. The fierce temper of the tyrant was exasperated by disappointments, which he imputed to the cowardice of his army. His wanton and ill-timed cruelty, instead of striking terror, inspired hatred and a just desire of revenge. A party of Pretorian guards, who trembled for their wives and children in the camp of Alba, near Rome, executed the sentence of the senate. Maximin, abandoned by his guards, was (AD 238, April) slain in his tent, with his son (whom he had associated to the honors of the purple). Also killed were Anulinus the prefect, and the principal ministers of his tyranny.<sup>29</sup> The sight of their heads, borne on the point of spears, convinced the citizens of Aquileia that the siege was at an end. The gates of the city were thrown open, a liberal market was provided for the hungry troops of Maximin, and the whole army joined in solemn protestations of fidelity to the senate and the people of Rome, and to their lawful emperors Maximus and Balbinus. Such was the deserved fate of a brutal savage, destitute, as he has generally been represented, of every sentiment that distinguishes a civilized, or even a human being. The body was suited to the soul. The stature of Maximin exceeded the measure of eight feet, and circumstances almost incredible are related of his matchless strength and appetite.<sup>30</sup> Had he lived in a less enlightened age, tradition and poetry might well have described him as one of those monstrous giants, whose supernatural power was constantly exerted for the destruction of mankind.

### *His Portrait*

It is easier to conceive than to describe the universal joy of the Roman world on the fall of the tyrant, the news of which is said to have been carried in four days from Aquileia to Rome. The return of Maximus was a triumphal procession. His colleague and young Gordian went out to meet him, and the three princes made their entry into the capital. There were attended by the ambassadors of almost all the cities of Italy, saluted with the splendid offerings of gratitude and superstition, and received with the unfeigned acclamations of the senate and people, who persuaded themselves that a golden age would succeed to an age of iron.<sup>31</sup> The conduct of the two emperors corresponded with these expectations. They administered justice in person; and the rigor of the one was tempered by the other's clemency. The oppressive taxes with which Maximin had loaded the rights of inheritance and succession were repealed, or at least moderated. Discipline was revived, and with the advice of the senate many wise laws were enacted by their imperial ministers, who endeavored to restore a civil

<sup>29</sup> Herodian, I. viii. p. 279. Hist. August. p. 146. The duration of Maximin's reign has not been defined with much accuracy, except by Eutropius, who allows him 3 years and a few days (I. ix. 1); we may depend on the integrity of the text, as the Latin original is checked by the Greek version of Paeanius.

<sup>30</sup> Eight Roman feet and one-third, which are equal to above eight English feet, as the two measures are to each other in the proportion of 967 to 1,000. See Grave's discourse on the Roman foot. We are told that Maximin could drink about seven gallons of wine in a day, and eat thirty or forty pounds of meat. He could move a loaded wagon, break a horse's leg with his fist, crumble stones in his hand, and tear up small trees by the roots. See his Lila in the Augustan History.

<sup>31</sup> See the congratulatory letter of Claudius Julianus, the consul, to the two emperors, in the Augustan History.

constitution on the ruins of military tyranny. “What reward may we expect for delivering Rome from a monster?” was the question asked by Maximus, in a moment of freedom and confidence. Balbinus answered it without hesitation, “The love of the senate, of the people, and of all mankind.” “Alas!” replied his more penetrating colleague, “Alas! I dread the hatred of the soldiers, and the fatal effects of their resentment.” (Hist. August. p. 171) His apprehensions were but too well justified by the event.

### *Sedition At Rome*

While Maximus was preparing to defend Italy against the common foe, Balbinus, who remained at Rome, had been engaged in scenes of blood and intestine discord. Distrust and jealousy reigned in the senate; and even in the temples where they assembled, every senator carried either open or concealed arms. In the midst of their deliberations, two veterans of the guards, actuated either by curiosity or a sinister motive, audaciously thrust themselves into the house, and advanced by degrees beyond the altar of Victory. Gallicanus, a consular, and Maecenas, a Pretorian senator, viewed with indignation their insolent intrusion. Drawing their daggers, they laid the spies—for such they deemed them—dead at the foot of the altar, and then advancing to the door of the senate, imprudently exhorted the multitude to massacre the Pretorians, as the secret adherents of the tyrant. Those who escaped the first fury of the tumult took refuge in the camp, which they defended with superior advantage against the reiterated attacks of the people, assisted by the numerous bands of gladiators, the property of opulent nobles. The civil war lasted many days, with infinite loss and confusion on both sides. When the pipes were broken that supplied the camp with water, the Pretorians were reduced to intolerable distress; but in their turn they made desperate sallies into the city, set fire to a great number of houses, and filled the street with the blood of the inhabitants. The emperor Balbinus attempted, by ineffectual edicts and precarious truces, to reconcile the factions at Rome. But their animosity, though smothered for a while, burned with redoubled violence. The soldiers, detesting the senate and the people, despised the weakness of a prince who wanted either the spirit or the power to command the obedience of his subjects. (Herodian, l. viii. p. 258)

### *Discontent of the Pretorian Guards*

After the tyrant’s death, his formidable army had acknowledged, from necessity rather than from choice, the authority of Maximus, who transported himself without delay to the camp before Aquileia. As soon as he had received their oath of fidelity, he addressed them in terms full of mildness and moderation. He lamented, rather than arraigned, the wild disorders of the times, and assured the soldiers that, of all their past conduct, the senate would remember only their generous desertion of the tyrant and their voluntary return to their duty. Maximus enforced his exhortations with a liberal sum of money, purified the camp by a solemn sacrifice of expiation, and then dismissed the legions to their several provinces, impressed, as he hoped, with a lively sense of gratitude and obedience. Herodian, l. viii. p. 213) But nothing could reconcile the haughty spirit of the Pretorians. They attended the emperors on the memorable day of their public entry into Rome; but amid the general acclamations, the sullen dejected countenance of the guards sufficiently declared that they considered themselves as the object, rather than the partners, of the triumph.. When the whole body was united in their camp, those who had served under Maximin, and those who had remained at Rome, insensibly communicated to each other their complaints and apprehensions. The emperors chosen by the army had perished with ignominy; those elected by the senate were seated on the throne.<sup>32</sup> The long discord between the civil

<sup>32</sup> The observation had been made imprudently enough in the acclamations of the senate, and with regard to the soldiers it carried the appearance of a wanton insult. Hist. August. p. 170.

and military powers was decided by a war, in which the former had obtained a complete victory. The soldiers must now learn a new doctrine of submission to the senate; and whatever clemency was affected by that politic assembly, they dreaded a slow revenge, colored by the name of discipline and justified by fair pretences of the public good. But their fate was still in their own hands; and if they had courage to despise the vain terrors of an impotent republic, it was easy to convince the world that those who were masters of the arms, were masters of the authority of the state.

### *Massacre of Maximus and Balbinus*

When the senate elected two princes, it is probable that, besides the declared reason of providing for the various emergencies of peace and war, they were actuated by the secret desire of weakening by division the despotism of the supreme magistrate. Their policy was effectual, but it proved fatal both to their emperors and to themselves. The jealousy of power was soon exasperated by the difference of character. Maximus despised Balbinus as a luxurious noble, and was in his turn disdained by his colleague as an obscure soldier. Their silent discord was understood rather than seen.<sup>33</sup> But the mutual consciousness prevented them from uniting in any vigorous measures of defense against their common enemies of the Pretorian camp. The whole city was (AD 238, July 15) employed in the Capitoline games, and the emperors were left almost alone in the palace. Suddenly they were alarmed by the approach of a troop of desperate assassins. Ignorant of each other's situation or designs—for they already occupied very distant apartments—afraid to give or to receive assistance, they wasted the important moments in idle debates and fruitless recriminations. The arrival of the guards put an end to the vain strife. They seized on these emperors of the senate, for such they called them with malicious contempt, stripped them of their garments, and dragged them in insolent triumph through the streets of Rome, with a design of inflicting a slow and cruel death on those unfortunate princes. The fear of a rescue from the faithful Germans of the Imperial guards shortened their tortures; and their bodies, mangled with a thousand wounds, were left exposed to the insults or to the pity of the populace. (Herodian, 1. viii. pp. 287, 288)

### *The Third Gordian Remains Sole Emperor*

In the space of a few months, six princes had been assassinated by the sword. Gordian, who had already received the title of Caesar, was the only person that occurred to the soldiers as proper to fill the vacant throne.<sup>34</sup> They carried him to the camp, and unanimously saluted him Augustus and Emperor. His name was dear to the senate and people; his tender age promised a long impunity of military license. The submission of Rome and the provinces to the choice of the Pretorian guards saved the republic, at the expense indeed of its freedom and dignity, from the horrors of a new civil war in the heart of the capital.<sup>35</sup>

### *Innocence and Virtues of Gordian; AD 240: Administration of Misitheus*

The third Gordian was only 19 years old at the time of his death. The history of his life, were it

<sup>33</sup> Latin text omitted.

<sup>34</sup> Latin text omitted.

<sup>35</sup> Quintus Curtius (1. x. c. 9) pays an elegant compliment to the emperor of the day for having, by his happy accession, extinguished so many firebrands, sheathed so many swords, and put an end to the evils of a divided government. After weighing with attention every word of the passage, I am of opinion that it suits better with the elevation of Gordian than with any other period of the Roman History. In that case, it may serve to decide the age of Quintus Curtius. Those who place him under the first Caesars, argue from the purity of his style, but are embarrassed by the silence of Quintilian, in his accurate list of Roman historians.

known to us with greater accuracy than it really is, would contain little more than the account of his education, and the conduct of the ministers, who by turns abused or guided the simplicity of his inexperienced youth. Immediately after his accession, he fell into the hands of his mother's eunuchs, that pernicious vermin of the East, who, since the days of Elagabalus, had infested the Roman palace. By the artful conspiracy of these wretches, an impenetrable veil was drawn between an innocent prince and his oppressed subjects, the virtuous disposition of Gordian was deceived, and the honors of the empire sold without his knowledge, though in a very public manner, to the most worthless of mankind. We are ignorant by what fortunate accident the emperor escaped from this ignominious slavery, and devolved his confidence on a minister whose wise counsels had no object except the glory of his sovereign and the happiness of the people. It should seem that (AD 240) love and learning introduced Misiheus to the favor of Gordian. The young prince married the daughter of his master of rhetoric, and promoted his father-in-law to the first offices of the empire. Two admirable letters that passed between them are still extant. The minister, with the conscious dignity of virtue, congratulates Gordian that he is delivered from the tyranny of the eunuchs,<sup>36</sup> and still more that he is sensible of his deliverance. The emperor acknowledges, with an amiable confusion, the errors of his past conduct. He laments, with singular propriety, the misfortune of a monarch from whom a venal tribe of courtiers perpetually labor to conceal the truth.<sup>37</sup>

#### *AD 242: The Persian War*

The life of Misiheus had been spent in the profession of letters, not of arms; yet such was the versatile genius of that great man, that, when (AD 242) he was appointed Pretorian prefect, he discharged the military duties of his place with vigor and ability. The Persians had invaded Mesopotamia, and threatened Antioch. By the persuasion of his father-in-law, the young emperor gave up the luxury of Rome, opened, for the last time recorded in history, the temple of Janus, and marched in person into the East. On his approach with a great army, the Persians withdrew their garrisons from the cities which they had already taken, and retired from the Euphrates to the Tigris. Gordian enjoyed the pleasure of announcing to the senate the first success of his arms, which he ascribed with a becoming modesty and gratitude to the wisdom of his father and prefect. During the whole expedition, Misiheus watched over the safety and discipline of the army; while he prevented their dangerous murmurs by maintaining a regular plenty in the camp, and by establishing ample magazines of vinegar, bacon, straw, barley, and wheat, in all the cities of the frontier.<sup>38</sup> But the prosperity of Gordian expired with Misiheus, who died of a flux, not without very strong suspicions of poison. Philip, his successor (AD 243) in the prefecture, was an Arab by birth, and consequently, in the earlier part of his life, a robber by profession. His rise from so obscure a station to the first dignities of the empire seems to prove that he was a bold and able leader. But his boldness prompted him to aspire to the throne, and his abilities were employed to supplant, not to serve, his indulgent master. The minds of the soldiers were irritated by an artificial scarcity, created by his contrivance in the camp; and the distress of the army was attributed to the youth and incapacity of the prince. It is not in our power to trace the successive steps of the secret conspiracy and open sedition which were at length fatal to Gordian. A sepulchral

<sup>36</sup> Hist. August. p. 161. From some hints in the two letters, I should expect that the eunuchs were not expelled from the palace, without some degree of gentle violence, and that young Gordian rather approved of than consented to their disgrace.

<sup>37</sup> Latin text omitted.

<sup>38</sup> Hist. August. p. 162. Aurelius Victor. Porphyrius in Vit. Plotin. ap. Fabricium Biblioth. Greac. 1. iv. c. 36. The philosopher Plotinus accompanied the army, prompted by the love of knowledge, and by the hope of penetrating as far as India.

monument was erected to his memory on the spot<sup>39</sup> where (AD 244, March) he was killed, near the conflux of the Euphrates with the little river Aboras.<sup>40</sup> The fortunate Philip, raised to the empire by the votes of the soldiers, found a ready obedience from the senate and the provinces.<sup>41</sup>

*Philip's Strategy; AD 244: Gordian's Murder; Form of A Military Republic; Reign of Philip*

We cannot forbear transcribing the ingenious, though somewhat fanciful description, which a celebrated writer of our own times has traced of the military government of the Roman Empire:

What in that age was called the Roman Empire was only an irregular republic, not unlike the Aristocracy,<sup>42</sup> of Algiers,<sup>43</sup> where the militia, possessed of the sovereignty, creates and deposes a magistrate, who is styled a Dey. Perhaps, indeed, it may be laid down as a general rule, that a military government is, in some respects, more republican than monarchical. Nor can it be said that the soldiers only partook of the government by their disobedience and rebellions. The speeches made to them by the emperors, were they not at length of the same nature as those formerly pronounced to the people by the consuls and the tribunes? And although the armies had no regular place or forms of assembly; though their debates were short, their action sudden, and their resolves seldom the result of cool reflection, did they not dispose, with absolute sway, of the public fortune? What was the emperor, except the minister of a violent government elected for the private benefit of the soldiers?

When the army had elected Philip, who was Pretorian prefect to the third Gordian, the latter demanded that he might remain sole emperor; he was unable to obtain it. He requested that the power might be equally divided between them; the army would not listen to his speech. He consented to be degraded to the rank of Caesar; the favor was refused him. He desired, at least, he might be appointed Pretorian prefect; his prayer was rejected. Finally, he pleaded for his life. The army, in these several judgments, exercised the supreme magistracy.

According to the historian, whose doubtful narrative the president De Montesquieu has adopted, Philip, who during the whole transaction had preserved a sullen silence, was inclined to spare the innocent life of his benefactor. Later, recollecting that his innocence might excite a dangerous compassion in the Roman world, he commanded, without regard to his suppliant cries, that he should be seized, stripped, and led away to instant death. After a moment's pause the inhuman sentence was executed.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup> About twenty miles from the little town of Circesium, on the frontier of the two empires.

<sup>40</sup> The inscription (which contained a very singular pun) was erased by the order of Licinius, who claimed some degree of relationship to Philip (Hist. August. p. 165); but the mound of earth which formed the sepulchre, still subsisted in the time of Julian. Ammian. Marcellin. xxiii. 5.

<sup>41</sup> Aurelius Victor. Eutrop. ix. 2. Orosius, vii. 20. Ammianus Marcellinus, xxiii. 5. Zosimus, L i. p. 19. Philip, who was a native of Bostra, was about forty years of age.

<sup>42</sup> Can the epithet of Aristocracy be applied, with any propriety, to the government of Algiers? Every military government floats between the extremes of absolute monarchy and wild democracy.

<sup>43</sup> The military republic of the Mamalukes in Egypt would have afforded M. de Montesquieu (Considerations sur la Grandeur et la Decadence des Romains, c. 16) a juster and more noble parallel.

<sup>44</sup> The Augustan History (pp. 163, 164) cannot, in this instance, be reconciled with itself or with probability. How could Philip condemn his predecessor, and yet consecrate his memory? How could he order his public execution, and yet, in his letters to the senate, exculpate himself from the guilt of his death? Philip, though an ambitious usurper, was by no means a mad tyrant. Some chronological difficulties have likewise been discovered by the nice eyes of Tillemont and Muratori, in this supposed association of Philip to the empire.

### *AD 248: Secular Games*

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 (AD 248, April 21) the secular games with infinite pomp and magnificence. Since their institution or revival by Augustus,<sup>45</sup> 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<sup>46</sup> 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 Tiber; 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 27 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. They requested, in religious hymns, that, according to the faith of their ancient oracles, they would still maintain the virtue, joy, and the empire of the Roman people.<sup>47</sup> The magnificence of Philip's shows and entertainment dazzled the eyes of the multitude. The devout were employed in the rites of superstition, while the reflecting few revolved in their anxious minds the past history and the future fate of the empire.

### *Decline of the Roman Empire*

Ten centuries had already elapsed since Romulus and a small band of shepherds and outlaws fortified themselves on the hills near the Tiber.<sup>48</sup> During the first four 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 35 tribes of the Roman people, was 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 tumultuous 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.

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

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<sup>45</sup> 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 VIII., the crafty pope pretended that he only revived an ancient institution. M. le Chais *Lettres sur las Jubilès*.

<sup>46</sup> Either of 100, or 110 years. Varro and Livy adopted the former opinion, but the infallible authority of the Sibyl consecrated the latter (*Censorious de Die Natal. c. 17*). The emperors Claudius and Philip, however, did not treat the oracle with implicit respect.

<sup>47</sup> The idea of the secular games is best understood from the poem of Horace, and the description of Zosimus.

<sup>48</sup> The received calculation of Varro assigns to the foundation of Rome an era 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.

monarch no less powerful than Hadrian or Augustus had formerly been. The form was 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.

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