

CHAPTER XII

Conduct of the Army and Senate after the Death of Aurelian—Reigns of Tacitus, Frobus, Carus, and His Sons

AD 275: Contest Between the Army and the Senate for the Choice of An Emperor

Such was the unhappy condition of the Roman emperors, that, whatever might be their conduct, their fate was commonly the same. A life of pleasure or virtue, of severity or mildness, of indolence or glory, alike led to an untimely grave; and almost every reign is closed by the same disgusting repetition of treason and murder. The death of Aurelian, however, is remarkable by its extraordinary consequences. The legions admired, lamented, and revenged their victorious chief. The artifice of his perfidious secretary was discovered and punished. The deluded conspirators attended the funeral of their injured sovereign, with sincere or well-feigned contrition, and submitted to the unanimous resolution of the military order, which was signified by the following epistle:

The brave and fortunate armies to the senate and people of Rome. The crimes of one man, and the error of many, have deprived us of the late emperor Aurelian. May it please you, venerable lords and fathers! To place him in the number of the gods, and to appoint a successor whom your judgment shall declare worthy of the Imperial purple! None of those whose guilt or misfortune have contributed to our loss shall ever reign over us.¹

The Roman senators heard, without surprise, that another emperor had been assassinated in his camp: they secretly rejoiced in the fall of Aurelian; but the modest and dutiful address of the legions, when it was communicated in full assembly by the consul, diffused the most pleasing astonishment. Such honors as fear and perhaps esteem could extort, they liberally poured forth on the memory of their deceased sovereign. Such acknowledgments as gratitude could inspire, they returned to the faithful armies of the republic, who entertained so just a sense of the legal authority of the senate in the choice of an emperor. Yet, notwithstanding this flattering appeal, the most prudent of the assembly declined exposing their safety and dignity to the caprice of an armed multitude. The strength of the legions was, indeed, a pledge of their sincerity, since those who may command are seldom reduced to the necessity of dissembling; but could it naturally be expected that a hasty repentance would correct the inveterate habits of fourscore years? Should the soldiers relapse into their accustomed sedition, their insolence might disgrace the majesty of the senate, and prove fatal to the object of its choice. Motives like these dictated a decree, by which the election of a new emperor was referred to the suffrage of the military order.

An Empty Throne for 8 Months

The contention that (AD 275, Feb. 3) ensued is one of the best attested, but most improbable, events in the history of mankind.² The troops, as if satiated with the exercise of power, again conjured the senate to invest one of its own bodies with the Imperial purple. The senate still persisted in its refusal; the army in its request. The reciprocal offer was pressed and rejected at least three times, and while the obstinate modesty of either party was resolved to receive a master from the hands of the other, 8 months elapsed. This was an amazing period of tranquil anarchy, during which the Roman

¹ Vopiscus in Hist. August. p. 222. Aurelius Victor mentions a formal deputation from the troops to the senate.

² Vopiscus, our principal authority, wrote at Rome, only 16 after Aurelian's death. Besides the recent notoriety of the facts, he constantly draws his materials from the Journals of the Senate, and the original papers of the Ulpian library. Zosimus and Zonaras appear as ignorant of this transaction as they were in general of the Roman constitution.

world remained without a sovereign, without a usurper, and without a sedition. The generals and magistrates appointed by Aurelian continued to execute their ordinary functions; and it is observed that a proconsul of Asia was the only considerable person removed from his office, in the whole course of the period while the throne was empty.

An event somewhat similar, but much less authentic, is supposed to have happened after the death of Romulus, who in his life and character bore some affinity with Aurelian. The throne was vacant for 12 months, till the election of a Sabine philosopher, and the public peace was guarded in the same manner, by the union of the several orders of the state. But, in the time of Numa and Romulus, the arms of the people were controlled by the authority of the Patricians. The balance of freedom was easily preserved in a small and virtuous community.³ The decline of the Roman state, far different from its infancy, was attended with every circumstance that could banish from this period the prospect of obedience and harmony. An immense and tumultuous capital, a wide extent of empire, the servile equality of despotism, an army of four hundred thousand mercenaries, and the experience of frequent revolutions. Yet, notwithstanding all these temptations, the discipline and memory of Aurelian still restrained the seditious temper of the troops, as well as the fatal ambition of their leaders. The legion's youth maintained their stations on the banks of the Bosphorus, and the Imperial standard awed the less powerful camps of Rome and of the provinces. A generous though transient enthusiasm seemed to animate the military order. We may hope that a few real patriots cultivated the returning friendship of the army and the senate, as the only expedient capable of restoring the republic to its ancient beauty and vigor.

On Sept. 25, AD 275, nearly 8 months after Aurelian's murder, the consul convoked an assembly of the senate, and reported the doubtful and dangerous situation of the empire. He slightly insinuated that the precarious loyalty of the soldiers depended on the chance of every hour and of every accident; but he represented, with the most convincing eloquence, the various dangers that might attend any further delay in the choice of an emperor. Intelligence, he said, was already received that the Germans had passed the Rhine, and occupied some of the strongest and most opulent cities of Gaul. The ambition of the Persian king kept the East in perpetual alarms; Egypt, Africa, and Illyricum were exposed to foreign and domestic arms, and the levity of Syria would prefer even a female ruler to the sanctity of the Roman laws. The consul, then, addressing himself to Tacitus, the first of the senators,⁴ required his opinion on the important subject of a proper candidate for the vacant throne.

Tacitus Elected Emperor

If we can prefer personal merit to accidental greatness, we shall esteem the birth of Tacitus more truly noble than that of kings. He claimed his descent from the philosophic historian whose writings will instruct the last generations of mankind.⁵ The senator Tacitus was then 75.⁶ The long period of his innocent life was adorned with wealth and honors. He had twice been invested with the consular dignity,⁷ and enjoyed with elegance and sobriety his ample patrimony of between £2 and £3 million.⁸

³ Liv. i. 17. Dionys. Halicarn. i. ii. p. 115. Plutarch in Numa, p. 60. The first of these writers relates the story like an orator, the second like a lawyer, and the third like a moralist. None of them probably without some intermixture of fable.

⁴ Vopiscus (in Hist. August. p. 227) calls him "primae sententiae consularis"; and soon afterward *Princeps senatoris*. It is natural to suppose that Rome's monarchs, disdaining that humble title, resigned it to the most ancient of the senators.

⁵ The only objection to this genealogy is that the historian was named Cornelius, the emperor, Claudius. But under the lower empire surnames were extremely various and uncertain.

⁶ Zonaras, l. xii. p. 637. The Alexandrian Chronicle by an obvious mistake, transfers that age to Aurelian.

⁷ In the year 273, he was ordinary consul. But he must have been Suffectus many years before, and most probably under Valerian.

⁸ *Bis millies octingenties* (two thousand, eight hundred). Vopiscus in Hist. August. p. 229. According to the old standard,

The experience of so many princes, whom he had esteemed or endured, from the vain follies of Elagabalus to the useful rigor of Aurelian, taught him to form a just estimate of the duties, dangers, and temptations of their sublime station. From the assiduous study of his immortal ancestor he derived the knowledge of the Roman constitution and human nature.⁹ The voice of the people had already named Tacitus as the citizen the most worthy of empire. The ungrateful rumor reached his ears, and induced him to seek the retirement of one of his villas in Campania. He dwelt 2 months in the delightful privacy of Baiæ, when he reluctantly obeyed the summons of the consul to resume his honorable place in the senate, and to assist the republic with his counsels on this important occasion.

He arose to speak, when, from every quarter of the house, he was saluted with the names of Augustus and Emperor. “Tacitus Augustus, the gods preserve thee, we choose thee for our sovereign, to thy care we entrust the republic and the world. Accept the empire from the authority of the senate. it is due to thy rank, to thy conduct, to thy manners.” As soon as the tumult of acclamations subsided, Tacitus attempted to decline the dangerous honor, and to express his wonder that they should elect his age and infirmities to succeed the martial vigor of Aurelian. He replied:

“Are these limbs, conscript fathers, fitted to sustain the weight of armor, or to practice the exercises of the camp? The variety of climates, and the hardships of a military life, would soon oppress a feeble constitution, which subsists only by the tenderest management. My exhausted strength scarcely enables me to discharge the duty of a senator; how insufficient would it prove to the arduous labors of war and government? Can you hope that the legions will respect a weak old man, whose days have been spent in the shade of peace and retirement? Can you desire that I should ever find reason to regret the favorable opinion of the senate?” (Vopiscus in Hist. August. p. 227.)

The Senate's Authority

The reluctance of Tacitus—and it might possibly be sincere—was encountered by the affectionate obstinacy of the senate. Five hundred voices repeated at once, in eloquent confusion, that the greatest of the Roman princes, Numa, Trajan, Hadrian, and the Antonines, had ascended the throne in a very advanced season of life. It was the mind, not the body, a sovereign, not a soldier, that was the object of their choice. They expected from him no more than to guide by his wisdom the valor of the legions. These pressing though tumultuous instances were seconded by a more regular oration of Metius Falconius, the next on the consular bench to Tacitus himself. He reminded the assembly of the evils which Rome had endured from the vices of headstrong and capricious youths. He congratulated them on the election of a virtuous and experienced senator. With a manly, though perhaps a selfish, freedom, exhorted Tacitus to remember the reasons of his elevation, and to seek a successor, not in his own family, but in the republic. The speech of Falconius was enforced by a general acclamation. The emperor-elect submitted to the authority of his country, and received the voluntary homage of his equals. The judgment of the senate was confirmed by the consent of the Roman people, and of the Pretorian guards.¹⁰

this sum was equivalent to 840,000 Roman pounds of silver, each worth £3 sterling. But in the age of Tacitus, the coin had lost much of its weight and purity.

⁹ After his accession, he gave orders that ten copies of the historian should be annually transcribed and placed in the public libraries. The Roman libraries have long since perished, and the most valuable part of Tacitus was preserved in a single MS. and discovered in a monastery of Westphalia. Bayle, Dictionnaire, Art. *Tacite*, and Lipsius ad Annal. ii. 9.

¹⁰ Hist. August. p. 228. Tacitus addressed the Pretorians by the title of *sanetissimi milities* (healed military), and the people by that of *sacratissimi Quirites* (sacred inhabitants).

The Senate's Joy and Confidence

The administration of Tacitus was not unworthy of his life and principles. A grateful servant of the senate, he considered that national council as the author, and himself as the subject, of the laws.¹¹ He studied to heal the wounds which Imperial pride, civil discord, and military violence, had inflicted on the constitution, and to restore at least the image of the ancient republic, as it had been preserved by the policy of Augustus, and the virtues of Trajan and the Antonines. It may worthwhile to recapitulate some of the most important prerogatives which the senate appeared to have regained by the election of Tacitus.¹²

1. To invest one of their body, under the title of emperor, with the general command of the armies and the government of the frontier provinces.
2. To determine the list, or as it was then styled, the College of Consuls. They were twelve in number, who, in successive pairs each, during the space of two months, filled the year, and represented the dignity of that ancient office. The authority of the senate, in the nomination of the consuls, was exercised with such independent freedom that no regard was paid to an irregular request of the emperor in favor of his brother Florianus. "The senate," exclaimed Tacitus, with the honest transport of a patriot, "understand the character of a prince whom they have chosen."
3. To appoint the proconsuls and presidents of the provinces, and to confer on all the magistrates their civil jurisdiction.
4. To receive appeals through the intermediate office of the prefect of the city from all the tribunals of the empire.
5. To give force and validity, by their decrees, to such as they should approve of the emperor's edicts.
6. To these several branches of authority we may add some inspection over the finances, since, even in the stern reign of Aurelian, it was in their power to divert a part of the revenue from the public service.¹³

Circular epistles were sent, without delay, to all the principal cities of the empire, Treves, Milan, Aquileia, Thessalonica, Corinth, Athens, Antioch, Alexandria, and Carthage, to claim their obedience, and to inform them of the happy revolution, which had restored the Roman senate to its ancient dignity. Two of these epistles are still extant. We likewise possess two very singular fragments of the private correspondence of the senators on this occasion. They discover the most excessive joy, and the most unbounded hopes. It is thus that one of the senators addresses his friend:

"Cast away your indolence," "emerge from your retirements of Baiae and Puteoli. Give yourself to the city, to the senate. Rome flourishes, the whole republic flourishes. Thanks to the Roman army, to an army truly Roman, at length we have recovered our just authority, the end of all our desires. We hear appeals, we appoint proconsuls, we create emperors; perhaps too we may restrain them—to the wise, a word is sufficient."¹⁴

¹¹ In his deliverance he never exceeded the number of a hundred, as limited by the Caninian law, which was enacted under Augustus, and at length repealed by Justinian. Casaubon ad locum Vopisci.

¹² See the Lives of Tacitus, Florianus, and Probus, in the Augustan History; we may be well assured that whatever the soldier gave the senator had already given.

¹³ Vopiscus in Hist. August. p. 216. The passage is perfectly clear; yet both Casaubon and Saimasius wish to correct it.

¹⁴ Vopiscus in Hist. August. pp. 230, 232, 233. The senators celebrated the happy restoration with offerings and public rejoicing.

These lofty expectations were, however, soon disappointed; nor, indeed, was it possible that the armies and the provinces should long obey the luxurious and peaceful nobles of Rome. On the slightest touch, the unsupported fabric of their pride and power fell to the ground. The expiring senate displayed a sudden luster, blazed for a moment, and was extinguished forever.

All that had yet (AD 276) passed at Rome was no more than a theatrical representation, unless it was ratified by the more substantial power of the legions. Leaving the senators to enjoy their dream of freedom and ambition, Tacitus proceeded to the Thracian camp, and was there, by the Pretorian prefect, presented to the assembled troops, as the prince whom they themselves had demanded, and whom the senate had bestowed. As soon as the prefect was silent, the emperor addressed himself to the soldiers with eloquence and propriety. He gratified their avarice by a liberal distribution of treasure under the names of pay and donations. He engaged their esteem by a spirited declaration that, although his age might disable him from the performance of military exploits, his counsels should never be unworthy of a Roman general, the successor of the brave Aurelian. (Hist. August. p. 228)

AD 276: The Alani Invade Asia; Repulsed By Tacitus

While the deceased emperor was making preparations for a second expedition into the East, he had negotiated with the Alani, a Scythian people, who pitched their tents in the neighborhood of the lake Moeotis. Those barbarians, allured by presents and subsidies, had promised to invade Persia with a numerous body of light cavalry. They were faithful to their engagements; but when they arrived on the Roman frontier, Aurelian was already dead, the design of the Persian war was at least suspended, and the generals, who, during the interregnum, exercised a doubtful authority, were unprepared either to receive or to oppose them. Provoked by such treatment, which they considered as trifling and dishonest, the Alani had recourse to their own valor for their payment and revenge; and as they moved with the usual swiftness of Tartars, they had soon spread themselves over the provinces of Pontus, Cappadocia, Cilicia, and Galatia. The legions, who from the opposite shores of the Bosphorus could almost distinguish the flames of the cities and villages, impatiently urged their general to lead them against the invaders. The conduct of Tacitus was suitable to his age and station. He convinced the barbarians of the faith, as well as of the power, of the empire. Great numbers of the Alani, appeased by the punctual discharge of the engagements which Aurelian had contracted with them, relinquished their booty and captives, and quietly retreated to their own deserts beyond the Phasis. Against the remainder who refused peace, the Roman emperor waged, in person, a successful war. Seconded by an army of brave and experienced veterans, in a few weeks he delivered the provinces of Asia from the terror of the Scythian invasion.¹⁵

Death of the Emperor Tacitus

But the glory and life of Tacitus were of short duration. Transported, in the depth of winter, from the soft retirement of Campania to the foot of Mount Caucasus, he sunk under the unaccustomed hardships of a military life. The fatigues of the body were aggravated by the cares of the mind. For a while, the angry and selfish passions of the soldiers had been suspended by the enthusiasm of public virtue. They soon broke out with redoubled violence, and raged in the camp, and even in the tent of the

¹⁵ Vopiscus in Hist. August. p. 230. Zosimus, l. 1. p. 57. Zonaras, l. xii. p. 637. Two passages in the Life of Probus (pp. 236, 238) convince me that these Scythian invaders of Pontus were Alani. If we may believe Zosimus (l. i. p. 58), Florianus pursued them as far as the Cimmerian Bosphorus. But he had scarcely time for so long and difficult an expedition.

aged emperor. His mild and amiable character served only to inspire contempt, and he was incessantly tormented with factions which he could not assuage, and by demands which it was impossible to satisfy. Whatever flattering expectations he had conceived of reconciling the public disorders, Tacitus soon was convinced that the licentiousness of the army disdained the feeble restraint of laws, and his last hour was hastened by anguish and disappointment. It may be doubtful whether the soldiers imbrued their hands in the blood of this innocent prince.¹⁶ It is certain that their insolence was the cause of his death. He expired (AD 276, April 12) at Tyana in Cappadocia, after a reign of only 6 months and about 20 days. According to the two Victors, he reigned exactly 200 days.

Character and Elevation of the Emperor Probus

The eyes of Tacitus were scarcely closed, before his brother Florianus showed himself unworthy to reign, by the hasty usurpation of the purple without expecting the approbation of the senate. The reverence for the Roman constitution, which yet influenced the camp and the provinces, was sufficiently strong to dispose them to censure, but not to provoke them to oppose, the precipitate ambition of Florianus. The discontent would have evaporated in idle murmurs, had not the general of the East, the heroic Probus, boldly declared himself the avenger of the senate. The contest, however, was still unequal; nor could the most able leader, at the head of the effeminate troops of Egypt and Syria, encounter, with any hopes of victory, the legions of Europe, whose irresistible strength appeared to support the brother of Tacitus. But the fortune and activity of Probus triumphed over every obstacle. The hardy veterans of his rival, accustomed to cold climates, sickened and consumed away in the sultry heats of Cilicia, where the summer proved remarkably unwholesome. Their numbers were diminished by frequent desertion; the mountain passes were thus poorly defended. Tarsus opened its gates, and the soldiers of Florianus, when they had permitted him to enjoy the Imperial title about three months, delivered (July) the empire from civil war by the easy sacrifice of a prince whom they despised.¹⁷

The perpetual revolutions of the throne had so perfectly erased every notion of hereditary right that the family of an unfortunate emperor was incapable of exciting the jealousy of his successors. The children of Tacitus and Florianus were permitted to descend into a private station, and to mingle with the general mass of the people. Their poverty indeed became an additional safeguard to their innocence. When Tacitus was elected by the senate, he resigned his ample patrimony to the public service (Hist. August. p. 229); an act of generosity specious in appearance, but which evidently disclosed his intention of transmitting the empire to his descendants. The only consolation of their fallen state was the remembrance of transient greatness, and a distant hope, the child of a flattering prophecy. Perhaps, at the end of a thousand years, a monarch of the race of Tacitus should arise, the protector of the senate, the restorer of Rome, and the conqueror of the whole earth.¹⁸

The peasants of Illyricum, who had already given Claudius and Aurelian to the sinking empire, had an equal right to glory in the elevation of Probus.¹⁹ More than twenty years before, the emperor Valerian, with his usual penetration, had discovered the rising merit of the young soldier, on whom he

¹⁶ Eutropius and Aurelius Victor only say that he died; Victor Junior adds that it was of a fever. Zosimus and Zonaras affirm that he was killed by the soldiers. Vopiscus mentions both accounts, and seems to hesitate. Yet surely these jarring opinions are easily reconciled.

¹⁷ Hist. August. p. 231. Zosimus, 1. i. pp. 58, 59. Zonaras, 1. xii. p. 637. Aurelius Victor says that Probus assumed the empire in Illyricum; an opinion which (though adopted by a very learned man) would throw that period of history into inextricable confusion.

¹⁸ He was to send judges to the Parthians, Persians, and Sarmatians, a president to Taprobana, and a proconsul to the Roman island (supposed by Casaubon and Salmasius to mean Britain). Such a history as mine (says Vopiscus with proper modesty) will not subsist a thousand years to expose or justify the prediction.

¹⁹ For the private life of Probus, Vopiscus in Hist. August. pp. 234-237.

conferred the rank of tribune, long before the age prescribed by the military regulations. The tribune soon justified his choice by a victory over a great body of Sarmatians, in which he saved the life of a near relation of Valerian. He deserved to receive from the emperor's hand the collars, bracelets, spears, and banners, the mural and the civic crown, and all the honorable rewards reserved by ancient Rome for successful valor. The third, and afterward the tenth, legion were entrusted to the command of Probus, who, in every step of his promotion, showed himself superior to the station which he filled. Africa and Pontus, the Rhine, the Danube, the Euphrates, and the Nile, by turns afforded him the most splendid occasions of displaying his personal prowess and his conduct in war. Aurelian was indebted to him for the conquest of Egypt, and still more indebted for the honest courage with which he often checked the cruelty of his master. Tacitus, who desired by the abilities of his generals to supply his own deficiency of military talents, named him commander-in-chief of all the eastern provinces, with five times the usual salary, the promise of the consulship, and the hope of a triumph. When Probus ascended the Imperial throne, he was about forty-four years of age,²⁰ in the full possession of his fame, of the love of the army, and of a mature vigor of mind and body.

His acknowledged merit, and the success of his arms against Florianus, left him without an enemy or a competitor. Yet, if we may credit his own professions, very far from being desirous of the empire, he had accepted it with the most sincere reluctance. "But it is no longer in my power," says Probus, in a private letter, "to lay down a title so full of envy and of danger. I must continue to personate the character which the soldiers have imposed upon me."²¹ His dutiful address to the senate displayed the sentiments, or at least the language, of a Roman patriot:

When you elected one from your order, conscript fathers, to succeed the emperor Aurelian, you acted in a manner suitable to your justice and wisdom. For you are the legal sovereigns of the world, and the power which you derive from your ancestors will descend to your posterity. Happy would it have been, if Florianus, instead of usurping the purple of his brother, like a private inheritance, had expected what your majesty might determine, either in his favor, or in that of any other person. The prudent soldiers have punished his rashness. To me they have offered the title of Augustus. But I submit to your clemency my pretensions and my merits.²²

When (AD 276, Aug. 3) this respectful epistle was read by the consul, the senators were unable to disguise their satisfaction that Probus should condescend thus humbly to solicit a scepter which he already possessed. They celebrated with the warmest gratitude his virtues, his exploits, and, above all, his moderation. A decree immediately passed, without a dissenting voice, to ratify the election of the eastern armies, and to confer on their chief all the several branches of the Imperial dignity. The names of Caesar and Augustus, the title of Father of his country, the right of making in the same day three motions in the senate,²³ the office of Pontifex Maximus, the tribunitian power, and the proconsular command. A mode of investiture which, though it seemed to multiply the authority of the emperor, expressed the constitution of the ancient republic. The reign of Probus corresponded with this fair beginning. The senate was permitted to direct the civil administration of the empire. Their faithful general asserted the honor of the Roman arms, and often laid at their feet crowns of gold and barbaric trophies, the fruits of his numerous victories.²⁴ Yet, while he gratified their vanity, he must secretly have

²⁰ According to the Alexandrian Chronicle, he was fifty at the time of his death.

²¹ The letter was addressed to the Pretorian prefect, whom (on condition of his good behavior) he promised to continue in his great office. Hist. August. p. 23.

²² Vopiscus in Hist. August. p. 237. The date of the letter is assuredly faulty. Instead of *Non. Februar*, we may read *Non. August*.

²³ Hist. August. p. 238. It is odd that the senate should treat Probus less favorably than Marcus Antoninus. That prince had received, even before the death of Pius, *Jus quintae relationis* (the fifth law passed). Capitolin. in Hist. August. p. 24.

²⁴ See the dutiful letter of Probus to the senate, after his German victories. Hist. August. p. 239.

despised their indolence and weakness. Though it was every moment in their power to repeal the disgraceful edict of Gallienus, the proud successors of the Scipios patiently acquiesced in their exclusion from all military employment. They soon experienced that those who refuse the sword must renounce the scepter.

AD 277: Victories of Probus Over the Barbarians

Aurelian's strength had crushed Rome's enemies on every side. After his death they seemed to revive with an increase of fury and of numbers. They were again vanquished by the active vigor of Probus, who, in a short reign of about six years,²⁵ equaled the fame of ancient heroes, and restored peace and order to every province of the Roman world. The dangerous frontier of Rhaetia he so firmly secured that he left it without the suspicion of an enemy. He broke the wandering power of the Sarmatian tribes, and by the terror of his arms compelled those barbarians to relinquish their spoil. The Gothic nation courted the alliance of so warlike an emperor. (Vopiscus in Hist. August. p. 239) He attacked the Isaurians in their mountains, besieged and took several of their strongest castles,²⁶ and flattered himself that he had forever suppressed a domestic foe whose independence so deeply wounded the majesty of the empire. The troubles excited by the usurper Firmus in the Upper Egypt had never been perfectly appeased, and the cities of Ptolemais and (Joptos, fortified by the alliance of the Blemmyes, still maintained an obscure rebellion. The chastisement of those cities, and of their auxiliaries the savages of the South, is said to have alarmed the court of Persia,²⁷ and the Great King sued in vain for the friendship of Probus. Most of the exploits which distinguished his reign were achieved by the personal valor and conduct of the emperor, insomuch that his biographer expresses some amazement how, in so short a time, a single man could be present in so many distant wars. The remaining actions he entrusted to the care of his lieutenants, the judicious choice of whom forms no inconsiderable part of his glory. Oarus, Diocletian, Maximian, Coustantius, Galerius, Asclepiodatus, Annibalianus, and a crowd of other chiefs, who afterward ascended or supported the throne, were trained to arms in the severe school of Aurelian and Probus.²⁸

But the most important service which Probus rendered to the republic was (AD 277) the deliverance of Gaul, and the recovery of 70 flourishing cities oppressed by the barbarians of Germany. Since the death of Aurelian, they had ravaged that great province with impunity. (Caesars of Julian, and Hist. August. pp. 238, 240, 241) Among the various multitude of those fierce invaders we may distinguish, with some degree of clearness, three great armies, or rather nations, successively vanquished by the valor of Probus. He drove back the Franks into their swamps. A descriptive circumstance from whence we may infer that the confederacy known by the manly title of "Free" already occupied the flat maritime country intersected and almost flooded by the stagnating waters of the Rhine, and that several tribes of the Frisians and Batavians had acceded to their alliance. He vanquished the Burgundians, a considerable people of the Vandalic race. They had wandered in quest of booty from the banks of the Oder to those of the Seine. They esteemed themselves sufficiently fortunate to purchase, by the restitution of all their booty, the permission of an undisturbed retreat. They

²⁵ The date and duration of the reign of Probus are very correctly ascertained by Cardinal Norris, in his learned work, *De Epochis Syro-Macedonum*, pp. 96—105. A passage of Eusebius connects the second year of Probus with the eras of several of the Syrian cities.

²⁶ Zosiinus (1. i. pp. 62—65) tells a very long and trifling story of Lycius the Isaurian robber.

²⁷ Zosim. 1. i. p. 65. Vopiscus in Hist. August. pp. 239, 240. But it seems Incredible that the defeat of the savages of Ethiopia could affect the Persian monarch.

²⁸ Besides these well-known chiefs, several others are named by Vopiscus (Hist. August. p. 241), whose actions have not reached our knowledge.

attempted to elude that article of the treaty. Their punishment was immediate and terrible.²⁹ But of all the invaders of Gaul, the most formidable were the Lygians, a distant people who reigned over a wide domain on the frontiers of Poland and Silesia.³⁰ In the Lygian nation, the Arii held the first rank by their numbers and fierceness.

The Arii (it is thus that they are described by the energy of Tacitus) study to improve by art and circumstances the innate terrors of their barbarism. Their shields are black, their bodies are painted black. They choose for the combat the darkest hour of the night. Their host advances, covered as it were with a funereal shade;³¹ nor do they often find an enemy capable of sustaining so strange and infernal an aspect. Of all our senses, the eyes are the first vanquished in battle. —Tacit. Germ. c. 43.

Yet the arms and discipline of the Romans easily discomfited these horrid phantoms. The Lygii were defeated in a general engagement, and Semno, the most renowned of their chiefs, fell alive into the hands of Probus. That prudent emperor, unwilling to reduce a brave people to despair, granted them an honorable capitulation, and permitted them to return in safety to their native country. But the losses which they suffered in the march, the battle, and the retreat, broke the power of the nation. Nor is the Lygian name ever repeated in the history either of Germany or of the empire. The deliverance of Gaul is reported to have cost the lives of 400,000 of the invaders. It was a work of labor to the Romans and of expense to the emperor, who gave a piece of gold for the head of every barbarian. (Vopiscus in Hist. August. p. 238) But as the fame of warriors is built on the destruction of humankind, we may naturally suspect that the brutal account was multiplied by the avarice of the soldiers, and accepted without any very severe examination by the liberal vanity of Probus.

Since Maximin's expedition, the Roman generals had confined their ambition to a defensive war against the nations of Germany, who perpetually pressed on the frontiers of the empire. The more daring Probus pursued his Gaffic victories, passed the Rhine, and displayed his invincible eagles on the banks of the Elbe and the Neckar. He was fully convinced that nothing could reconcile the minds of the barbarians to peace, unless they experienced in their own country the calamities of war. Germany, exhausted by the ill success of the last emigration, was astonished by his presence. Nine of the most considerable princes repaired to his camp, and fell prostrate at his feet. Such a treaty was humbly received by the Germans as it pleased the conqueror to dictate. He exacted a strict restitution of the effects and captives which they had carried away from the provinces; and obliged their own magistrates to punish the more obstinate robbers who presumed to detain any part of the spoil. A considerable tribute of corn, cattle, and horses, the only wealth of barbarians, was reserved for the use of the garrisons which Probus established on the limits of their territory. He even entertained some thoughts of compelling the Germans to relinquish the exercise of arms, and to trust their differences to the justice, their safety to the power, of Rome. To accomplish these salutary ends, the constant residence of an Imperial governor, supported by a numerous army, was indispensably requisite. Probus therefore judged it more expedient to defer the execution of so great a design; which was indeed rather of specious than solid utility.³² Had Germany been reduced into the state of a province, the Romans, with immense labor and expense, would have acquired only a more extensive boundary to defend against the fiercer and more active barbarians of Scythia.

²⁹ Zosimus. I. I. p. 62. Hist. August. p. 240. But the latter supposes the punishment inflicted with the consent of their kings; if so, it was partial, like the offence.

³⁰ Cluver. Germania Antiqua, l. iii. Ptolemy places in their country the city of Calisia, probably Calish in Silesia.

³¹ *Feralis umbra* (deadly shadow), is the expression of Tacitus; It is surely a very bold one.

³² Hist. August. pp. 238, 239. Vopiscus quotes a letter from the emperor to the senate, in which he mentions his design of reducing Germany into a province.

Probus Builds A Wall From the Rhine to the Danube

Instead of reducing the warlike natives of Germany to the condition of subjects, Probus contented himself with the humble expedient of raising a bulwark against their inroads. The country, which now forms the circle of Swabia, had been left desert in the age of Augustus by the emigration of its ancient inhabitants.³³ The fertility of the soil soon attracted a new colony from the adjacent provinces of Gaul. Crowds of adventurers, of a roving temper and of desperate fortunes, occupied the doubtful possession, and acknowledged, by the payment of tithes, the majesty of the empire.³⁴ To protect these new subjects, a line of frontier garrisons was gradually extended from the Rhine to the Danube. About the reign of Hadrian, when that mode of defense began to be practiced, these garrisons were connected and covered by a strong entrenchment of trees and palisades. In the place of such a crude bulwark, the emperor Probus constructed a stone wall of a considerable height, and strengthened it by towers at convenient distances. From the neighborhood of Newstadt and Ratisbon on the Danube, it stretched across hills, valleys, rivers, and morasses, as far as Wimpfen on the Neckar, and at length terminated on the banks of the Rhine, after a winding course of nearly 200 miles.³⁵ This important barrier, uniting the two mighty streams that protected the provinces of Europe, seemed to fill up the vacant space through which the barbarians, and particularly the Alemanni, could penetrate with the greatest facility into the heart of the empire. But the experience of the world, from China to Britain, has exposed the vain attempt of fortifying any extensive tract of country.³⁶ An active enemy, who can select and vary his points of attack, must, in the end, discover some feeble spot or some unguarded moment. The strength, as well as the attention, of the defenders is divided; and such are the blind effects of terror on the firmest troops, that a line broken in a single place is almost instantly deserted. The fate of the wall which Probus erected may confirm the general observation. Within a few years after his death it was overthrown by the Alemanni. Its scattered ruins, universally ascribed to the power of the Daemon, now serve only to excite the wonder of the Swabian peasant.

Introduction and Settlement of the Barbarians

Among the useful conditions of peace imposed by Probus on the vanquished nations of Germany, was the obligation of supplying the Roman army with 16,000 recruits, the bravest and most robust of their youth. The emperor dispersed them through all the provinces, and distributed this dangerous reinforcement, in small bands of 50 or 60 each, among the national troops; judiciously observing that the aid which the republic derived from the barbarians should be felt but not seen.³⁷ Their aid was now become necessary. The feeble elegance of Italy and the internal provinces could no longer support the burden of a military force. The hardy frontier of the Rhine and Danube still produced minds and bodies equal to the labors of the camp; but a perpetual series of wars had gradually diminished their numbers. The infrequency of marriage, and the ruin of agriculture, affected the principles of population and not

³³ Strabo, l. vii. According to Velleius Paterculus, (ii. 108), Maroboduus led his Marcomanni into Bohemia; Cluverius (German. Antiq. iii. 8) proves that it was from Swabia.

³⁴ These settlers from the payment of tithes were called *Decumates*. Tacit. Germania, c. 29.

³⁵ Notes de l'Abbe de la Bletterie à la Germanie de Tacite, p. 183. His account of the wall is chiefly borrowed (as he says himself) from the *Alsatia Illustrata of Schoepflin*.

³⁶ *Recherches sur les Chinois et les Egyptiens*, ii. pp. 81—102. The anonymous author is well acquainted with the globe in general, and with Germany in particular. With regard to the latter, he quotes a work of M. Hanselman; but he seems to confuse the wall of Probus, designed against the Alemanni, with the fortification of the Mattiaci, constructed in the neighborhood of Frankfort against the Catti.

³⁷ He distributed about 50 or 60 Barbarians to a *Numerus*, as it was then called, a corps with whose established number we are not exactly acquainted.

only destroyed the strength of the present, but intercepted the hope of future generations. The wisdom of Probus embraced a great and beneficial plan of replenishing the exhausted frontiers, by new colonies of captive or fugitive barbarians. On these he bestowed lands, cattle, farm instruments, and every encouragement that might engage them to educate a race of soldiers for the service of the republic. Into Britain, and most probably into Cambridgeshire,³⁸ he transported a considerable body of Vandals. The impossibility of an escape reconciled them to their situation, and in the subsequent troubles of that island they approved themselves the most faithful servants of the state.³⁹ Great numbers of Franks and Gepidae were settled on the banks of the Danube and the Rhine. A hundred thousand Bastarnae, expelled from their own country, cheerfully accepted an establishment in Thrace, and soon imbibed the manners and sentiments of Roman subjects.⁴⁰ But the expectations of Probus were too often disappointed. The impatience and idleness of the barbarians could ill brook the slow labors of agriculture. Their unconquerable love of freedom, rising against despotism, provoked them into hasty rebellions, alike fatal to themselves and to the provinces (Hist. August. p. 240). Nor could these artificial supplies, however repeated by succeeding emperors, restore the important limit of Gaul and Illyricum to its ancient and native vigor.

Daring Enterprise of the Franks

Of all the barbarians who abandoned their new settlements, and disturbed the public tranquillity, a very small number returned to their own country. For a short season they might wander in arms through the empire; but in the end they were surely destroyed by the power of a warlike emperor. The successful rashness of a party of Franks was attended, however, with such memorable consequences that it ought not to be passed unnoticed. They had been established by Probus on the seacoast of Pontus, with a view of strengthening the frontier against the inroads of the Alani. A fleet stationed in one of the harbors of the Euxine fell into the hands of the Franks; and they resolved, through unknown seas, to explore their way from the mouth of the Phasis to that of the Rhine. They easily escaped through the Bosphorus and the Hellespont, and, cruising along the Mediterranean, indulged their appetite for revenge and plunder, by frequent descents on the unsuspecting shores of Asia, Greece, and Africa. The opulent city of Syracuse, in whose port the navies of Athens and Carthage had formerly been sunk, was sacked by a handful of barbarians, who massacred the greater part of the trembling inhabitants. From the island of Sicily, the Franks proceeded to the columns of Hercules, trusted themselves to the ocean, coasted round Spain and Gaul, and steering their triumphant course through the British Channel, at length finished their surprising voyage by landing in safety on the Batavian or Frisian shores. (Panegy. Vet. V. 18; Zosimus, l. i. p. 66) The example of their success, instructing their countrymen to conceive the advantages, and to despise the dangers of the sea, pointed out to their enterprising spirit a new road to wealth and glory.

AD 279: Revolt of Saturnius in the East

Notwithstanding the vigilance and activity of Probus, it was almost impossible that he could at once contain in obedience every part of his wide-extended dominions. The barbarians, who broke their chains, had seized the favorable opportunity of a domestic war. When the emperor marched to the relief of Gaul, he devolved the command of the East on Saturninus. That general, a man of merit and experience, was driven into rebellion by the absence of his sovereign, the levity of the Alexandrian

³⁸ Camden's Britannia, Introduction, p. 136; but he speaks from a very doubtful conjecture.

³⁹ Zosimus, l. i. p. 62. According to Vopiscus, another body of Vandals was less faithful.

⁴⁰ Hist. August. p. 240. They were probably expelled by the Goths. Zosim. l. i. p. 66.

people, the pressing instances of his friends, and his own fears. But from the moment of his elevation (AD 279) he never entertained a hope of empire, or even of life. "Alas!" he said, "the republic has lost a useful servant, and the rashness of an hour has destroyed the services of many years. You know not," continued he, "the misery of sovereign power; a sword is perpetually suspended over our head. We dread our very guards, we distrust our companions. The choice of action or of repose is no longer in our disposition, nor is there any age, or character, or conduct, that can protect us from the censure of envy. In thus exalting me to the throne, you have doomed me to a life of cares, and to an untimely fate. The only consolation which remains is the assurance that I shall not fall alone."⁴¹ But as the former part of his prediction was verified by the victory, so the latter was disappointed by the clemency of Probus. That amiable prince attempted even to save the unhappy Saturninus from the fury of the soldiers. He had more than once solicited the usurper himself to place some confidence in the mercy of a sovereign who so highly esteemed his character that he had punished, as a malicious informer, the first who related the improbable news of his defection. (Zonaras, l. xii. p. 638) Saturninus might, perhaps, have embraced the generous offer, had he not been restrained by the obstinate distrust of his adherents. Their guilt was deeper, and their hopes more optimistic, than those of their experienced leader.

AD 280: Revolt of Bonosus and Proculus In Gaul

The revolt of Saturninus was scarcely extinguished in the East, before new troubles were excited in the West, by (AD 280) the rebellion of Bonosus and Proculus in Gaul. The most distinguished merit of those two officers was their respective prowess, of the one in the combats of Bacchus, of the other in those of Venus. Yet neither of them was destitute of courage and capacity, and, both sustained, with honor, the august character which the fear of punishment had engaged them to assume, till they sunk at length beneath the superior genius of Probus. He used the victory with his accustomed moderation, and spared the fortunes as well as the lives of their innocent families.⁴²

AD 281: Triumph of the Emperor Probus

The arms of Probus had now suppressed all the foreign and domestic enemies of the state. His mild but steady administration confirmed the re-establishment of the public tranquillity. Nor was there left in the provinces a hostile barbarian, tyrant, or even robber, to revive the memory of past disorders. It was time that the emperor should revisit Rome, and (AD 281) celebrate his own glory and the general happiness. The triumph due to the valor of Probus was conducted with a magnificence suitable to his fortune, and the people who had so lately admired the trophies of Aurelian gazed with equal pleasure on those of his heroic successor. (Hist. August. p. 240) We cannot, on this occasion, forget the desperate courage of about 80 gladiators, reserved with almost 600 others for the inhuman sports of the amphitheater. Disdaining to shed their blood for the amusement of the populace, they killed their keepers, broke from the place of their confinement, and filled the streets of Rome with blood and confusion. After an obstinate resistance, they were overpowered and cut in pieces by the regular forces. However, they obtained at least an honorable death and the satisfaction of a just revenge. (Zosim. l. i. p. 66)

⁴¹ Vopiscus in Hist. August. pp. 245, 246. The unfortunate orator had studied rhetoric at Carthage, and was therefore more probably a Moor (Zosirn. l. i. p. 60) than a Gaul, as Vopiscus calls him.

⁴² Proculus, who was a native of Albengue on the Genoese coast, armed two thousand of his own slaves. His riches were great, but they were acquired by robbery. It was afterward a saying of his family, *Nec latrones esse, nec principes sibi placere*. (A robber eats, but is not satisfied.) Vopiscus in Hist. August. p. 241.

His Discipline

The military discipline which reigned in the camps of Probus was less cruel than that of Aurelian, but it was equally rigid and exact. The latter had punished the irregularities of the soldiers with unrelenting severity, the former prevented them by employing the legions in constant and useful labors. When Probus commanded in Egypt, he executed many considerable works for the splendor and benefit of that rich country. The navigation of the Nile, so important to Rome itself, was improved; and temples, bridges, porticoes, and palaces, were constructed by the hands of the soldiers, who acted by turns as architects, engineers, and farmers. (Hist. August. p. 236) It was reported of Hannibal that, in order to preserve his troops from the dangerous temptations of idleness, he had obliged them to form large plantations of olive trees along the coast of Africa.⁴³ In the same way, Probus exercised his legions in covering the hills of Gaul and Pannonia with rich vineyards. Two considerable spots there are described which were entirely dug and planted by military labor.⁴⁴ One of these, known under the name of Mount Almo, was situated near Sirmium, the country where Probus was born, for which he ever retained a partial affection, and whose gratitude he endeavored to secure, by converting into tillage a large and unhealthy tract of marshy ground. An army, thus employed, constituted perhaps the most useful, as well as the bravest, portion of Roman subjects.

AD 282: Death of Probus

But in the prosecution of a favorite scheme, the best of men, satisfied with the rectitude of their intentions, are subject to forget the bounds of moderation. Nor did Probus himself sufficiently consult the patience and disposition of his fierce legionaries.⁴⁵ The dangers of the military profession seem only to be compensated by a life of pleasure and idleness. But if the duties of the soldier are incessantly aggravated by the labors of the peasant, he will at last sink under the intolerable burden, or shake it off with indignation. The imprudence of Probus is said to have inflamed the discontent of his troops. More attentive to the interests of mankind than to those of the army, he expressed the vain hope that, by the establishment of universal peace, he should soon abolish the necessity of a standing and mercenary force.⁴⁶ The unguarded expression proved fatal to him. In one of the hottest days of summer, as he severely urged the unwholesome labor of draining the marshes of Sirmium, the soldiers, impatient of fatigue, on a sudden threw down their tools, grasped their arms, and broke out into a furious mutiny. The emperor, conscious of his danger, took refuge in a lofty tower constructed for the purpose of surveying the progress of the work.⁴⁷ The tower was instantly forced, and (AD 282, Aug.) a thousand swords were plunged at once into the bosom of the unfortunate Probus. The rage of the troops subsided as soon as it had been gratified. They then lamented their fatal rashness, forgot the severity of the emperor whom they had massacred, and hastened to perpetuate, by an honorable monument, the memory of his virtues and victories.⁴⁸

⁴³ Aurel. Victor in Prob. But the policy of Hannibal, unnoticed by any more ancient writer, is irreconcilable with the history of his life. He left Africa when he was nine years old, returned to it when he was forty-five, and immediately lost his army in the decisive battle of Zama. Livius, xxx. 31.

⁴⁴ Hist. August. p. 240. Eutrop. ix. 17. Aurel. Victor in Prob. Victor Junior. He revoked the prohibition of Domitian, and granted a general permission of planting vines to the Gauls, the Britons, and the Pannonians,

⁴⁵ Julian bestows a severe, and indeed excessive, censure on the rigor of Probus, who, as he thinks, almost deserved his fate.

⁴⁶ Vopiscus in Hist. August. p. 241. He lavishes on this idle hope a large stock of very foolish eloquence.

⁴⁷ It seems to have been a movable tower, encased with iron.

⁴⁸ Latin text omitted.

Election of Carus

When the legions had indulged their grief and repentance for the death of Probus, their unanimous consent declared Carus, his Pretorian prefect, the most deserving of the Imperial throne. Every circumstance that relates to this prince appears of a mixed and doubtful nature. He gloried in the title of Roman Citizen, and affected to compare the purity of his blood with the foreign and even barbarous origin of the preceding emperors. Yet the most inquisitive of his contemporaries, very far from admitting his claim, have variously deduced his own birth, or that of his parents, from Illyricum, from Gaul, or from Africa.⁴⁹ Though a soldier, he had received a learned education; though a senator, he was invested with the first dignity of the army; and in an age when the civil and military professions began to be irrecoverably separated from each other, they were united in the person of Carus. Notwithstanding the severe justice which he exercised against the assassins of Probus, to whose favor and esteem he was highly indebted, he could not escape the suspicion of being accessory to a deed from whence he derived the principal advantage. He enjoyed, at least before his elevation, an acknowledged character of virtue and abilities.⁵⁰ However, his austere temper degenerated into moroseness and cruelty; and the imperfect writers of his life almost hesitate whether they shall not rank him in the number of Roman tyrants.⁵¹ When Carus assumed the purple, he was about 60 years of age, and his two Sons, Carinus and Numerian, had already attained the season of manhood.⁵²

The authority of the senate expired with Probus; nor was the repentance of the soldiers displayed by the same dutiful regard for the civil power which they had testified after the unfortunate death of Aurelian. The election of Carus was decided without expecting the approbation of the senate, and the new emperor contented himself with announcing, in a cold and stately epistle, that he had ascended the vacant throne.⁵³ A behavior so very opposite to that of his amiable predecessor afforded no favorable presage of the new reign; and the Romans, deprived of power and freedom, asserted their privilege of licentious murmurs. (Hist. August. p. 242) The voice of congratulation and flattery was not however silent; and we may still peruse, with pleasure and contempt, an eclogue which was composed on the accession of the emperor Carus. Two shepherds, avoiding the noontide heat, retire into the cave of Faunus. On a spreading beech tree they discover some newly carved letters. The rural deity had described, in prophetic verses, the happiness promised to the empire under the reign of so great a prince. Faunus hails the approach of that hero, who, receiving on his shoulders the sinking weight of the Roman world, shall extinguish war and faction, and once again restore the innocence and security of the golden age.⁵⁴

Carus Defeats the Sarmatians and Marches Into the East

It is more than probable that these elegant trifles never reached the ears of a veteran general, who, with the consent of the legions, was preparing to execute the long suspended design of the Persian war.

⁴⁹ Yet all this may be conciliated. He was born at Narbonne In Illyricum, confounded by Eutropius with the more famous city of that name in Gaul. His father might be an African, and his mother a noble Roman. Carus himself was educated in the capital. Scaliger, Animadversion, ad Busch. Chron. p. 241.

⁵⁰ Probus had requested of the senate an equestrian statue and a marble palace, at the public expense, as a just recompense of the singular merit of Carus. Vopiscus in Hist. August. p. 249.

⁵¹ Vopiscus in Hist. August. pp. 242, 249. Julian excludes the emperor Carus and both his sons from the banquet of the Caesars.

⁵² John Malela, v. l. p. 401. But the authority of that ignorant Greek is very slight. He ridiculously derives from Carus, the city of Carrhae, and the province of Caria, the latter of which is mentioned by Homer.

⁵³ Hist. August. p. 249. Carus congratulated the senate that one of their own order had been made emperor.

⁵⁴ First eclogue of Calphurnius. The design of it is preferred by Fontenelle to that of Virgil's Pollio, V. iii. p. 148.

Before his departure for this distant expedition, Carus conferred on his two sons, Carinus and Numerian, the title of Caesar. Investing the former with almost an equal share of the Imperial power, he directed the young prince, first to suppress some troubles which had arisen in Gaul, fix the seat of his residence at Rome, and finally to assume the government of the Western provinces. (Hist. August. p. 353; Eutrop. ix. 18; Pagi Annal) The safety of Illyricum was confirmed by a memorable defeat of the Sarmatians. Sixteen thousand of those barbarians remained on the field of battle, and the number of captives amounted to twenty thousand. The old emperor, animated with the fame and prospect of victory, pursued his march, in the midst of winter, through the countries of Thrace and Asia Minor, and at length, with his younger son Numerian, arrived on the confines of the Persian monarchy. There, encamping on the summit of a lofty mountain, he pointed out to his troops the opulence and luxury of the enemy whom they were about to invade.

Although he had subdued the Segestans, one of the most warlike nations of Upper Asia,⁵⁵ the successor of Artaxerxes, Varanes or Bahram, was alarmed at the approach (AD 283) of the Romans, and endeavored to retard their progress by a negotiation of peace. His ambassadors entered the camp about sunset, at the time when the troops were satisfying their hunger with a frugal meal. The Persians expressed their desire of being introduced to the presence of the Roman emperor. They were at length conducted to a soldier, who was seated on the grass. A piece of stale bacon and a few hard peas composed his supper. A coarse woolen garment of purple was the only circumstance that announced his dignity. The conference was conducted with the same disregard of courtly elegance. Carus, taking off a cap which he wore to conceal his baldness, assured the ambassadors that, unless their master acknowledged the superiority of Rome, he would speedily render Persia as naked of trees as his own head was destitute of hair.⁵⁶ Notwithstanding some traces of art and preparation, we may discover in this scene the manners of Carus, and the severe simplicity which the martial princes, who succeeded Gallienus, had already restored in the Roman camps. The ministers of the Great King trembled and retired.

AD 283: Victories and Extraordinary Death

The threats of Carus were not without effect. He ravaged Mesopotamia, cut in pieces whatever opposed his passage, made himself master of the great cities of Seleucia and Otesiphon (which seemed to have surrendered without resistance), and carried his victorious arms beyond the Tigris.⁵⁷ He had seized the favorable moment for an invasion. The Persian councils were distracted by domestic factions, and the greater part of their forces was detained on the frontiers of India. Rome and the East received with transport the news of such important advantages. Flattery and hope painted, in the most lively colors, the fall of Persia, the conquest of Arabia, the submission of Egypt, and a lasting deliverance from the inroads of the Scythian nations.⁵⁸ But the reign of Carus was destined to expose the vanity of predictions. They were scarcely uttered before they were contradicted by his death, an event (AD 283, Dec. 25) attended with such ambiguous circumstances that it may be related in a letter from his own secretary to the prefect of the city.

Carus, our dearest emperor, was confined by sickness to his bed, when a furious tempest arose in the camp. The

⁵⁵ Agathias, l. iv. p. 135. We find one of his sayings in the Bibliotheque Orientale of M. d'Herbelot. "The definition of humanity includes all other virtues."

⁵⁶ Synesius tells this story of Carinus; and it is much more natural to understand it of Carus than (as Petavius and Tillemont choose to do) of Probus.

⁵⁷ Vopiscus in Hist. August. p. 250. Eutropius, ix. 18. The two Victors.

⁵⁸ To the Persian victory of Carus I refer the dialogue of the *Philopatris*, which has so long been an object of dispute among the learned.

darkness which overspread the sky was so thick that we could no longer distinguish each other; and the incessant flashes of lightning took from us the knowledge of all that passed in the general confusion. Immediately after the most violent clap of thunder we heard a sudden cry that the emperor was dead. It soon appeared that his chamberlains, in a rage of grief, had set fire to the royal pavilion, a circumstance which gave rise to the report that Carus was killed by lightning. But, as far as we have been able to investigate the truth, his death was the natural effect of his disorder.⁵⁹

Carus' Sons, Carinus and Numerian

The vacancy of the throne was not productive of any disturbance. The ambition of the aspiring generals was checked by their mutual fears, and young Numerian, with his absent brother Carinus, were unanimously acknowledged as Roman emperors. The public expected that the successor of Carus would pursue his father's footsteps, and, without allowing the Persians to recover from their consternation, would advance sword in hand to the palaces of Susa and Ecbatana. (Nemesian; *Cynegeticon*, v. 71, etc) But the legions, however strong in numbers and discipline, were dismayed by the most abject superstition. Notwithstanding all the arts that were practiced to disguise the manner of the late emperor's death, it was found impossible to remove the opinion of the multitude, and the power of opinion is irresistible. Places or persons struck with lightning were considered by the ancients with pious horror, as singularly devoted to the wrath of Heaven.⁶⁰ An oracle was remembered, which marked the River Tigris as the fatal boundary of the Roman arms. The troops, terrified with the fate of Carus and with their own danger, called aloud on young Numerian to obey the will of the gods, and lead them away from this inauspicious scene of war. The feeble emperor was unable to subdue their obstinate prejudice, and the Persians wondered at the unexpected retreat of a victorious enemy.⁶¹

AD 284: Vices of Carinus

The intelligence of the mysterious fate of the late emperor was soon carried from the frontiers of Persia to Rome. The senate, as well as the provinces, congratulated the accession (AD 284) of the sons of Carus. These fortunate youths were strangers, however, to that conscious superiority, either of birth or of merit, which can alone render the possession of a throne easy, and as it were natural. Born and educated in a private station, the election of their father raised them at once to the rank of princes. His death, which happened about 16 months afterward, left them the unexpected legacy of a vast empire. To sustain this rapid elevation with temper, an uncommon share of virtue and prudence was requisite. Carinus, the elder of the brothers, was more than commonly deficient in those qualities. In the Gallic war, he discovered some degree of personal courage.⁶² From the moment of his arrival at Rome, however, he abandoned himself to the luxury of the capital, and to the abuse of his fortune. He was soft, yet cruel; devoted to pleasure, but destitute of taste; and though exquisitely susceptible of vanity, indifferent to the public esteem. In the course of a few months, he successively married and divorced nine wives, most of whom he left pregnant. Notwithstanding this legal inconstancy, he found time to indulge such a variety of irregular appetites as brought dishonor on himself and on the noblest houses of Rome. He beheld with inveterate hatred all those who might remember his former obscurity or censure his present conduct. He banished, or put to death, the friends and counselors whom his father

⁵⁹ Hist. August. p. 250. Yet Eutropius, Festus, Rufus, the two Victors, Jerome, Sidonius, Apollinaris, Syncellus, and Zonaras, all ascribe the death of Carus to lightning.

⁶⁰ Nestus and his commentators, on the word *Scribonianum*. Places struck with lightning were surrounded with a wall; things were buried with mysterious ceremony.

⁶¹ Vopiscus in Hist. August. p. 250. Aurelius Victor seems to believe the prediction, and to approve the retreat.

⁶² Nemesian. *Cynegeticon*, v. 69. He was a contemporary, but a poet.

had placed about him, to guide his inexperienced youth. He persecuted with the meanest revenge his school-fellows and companions, who had not sufficiently respected the latent majesty of the emperor. With the senators, Carinus affected a lofty and regal demeanor, frequently declaring that he designed to distribute their estates among the populace of Rome. From the dregs of that populace he selected his favorites, and even his ministers. The palace, and even the Imperial table, was filled with singers, dancers, prostitutes, and all the various retinue of vice and folly. He entrusted one of his doorkeepers⁶³ with the government of the city. In the rooms of the Pretorian prefect, whom he put to death, Carinus substituted one of the ministers of his looser pleasures. Another who possessed the same, or even a more infamous title to favor, was invested with the consulship. A confidential secretary, who had acquired uncommon skill in the art of forgery, delivered the indolent emperor, with his own consent, from the irksome duty of signing his name.

When the emperor Carus undertook the Persian war, he was induced by motives of affection as well as policy to secure the fortunes of his family by having in the hands of his eldest son the armies and provinces of the West. The intelligence which he soon received of the conduct of Carinus filled him with shame and regret. Nor had he concealed his resolution of satisfying the republic by a severe act of justice, and of adopting, in the place of an unworthy son, the brave and virtuous Constantius, who at that time was governor of Dalmatia. But the elevation of Constantius was for a while deferred; and as soon as the father's death had released Carinus from the control of fear or decency, he displayed to the Romans the extravagances of Elagabalus, aggravated by the cruelty of Domitian.⁶⁴

Carinus Celebrates the Roman Games

The only merit of the administration of Carinus, that history could record or poetry celebrate, was the uncommon splendor with which, in his own and his brother's name, he exhibited the Roman games of the theatre, the circus, and the amphitheater. More than 20 years afterward, when the courtiers of Diocletian represented to their frugal sovereign the fame and popularity of his munificent predecessor, he acknowledged that the reign of Carinus had indeed been a reign of pleasure.⁶⁵ But this vain prodigality, which the prudence of Diocletian might justly despise, was enjoyed with surprise and transport by the Roman people. The oldest of the citizens, recollecting the spectacles of former days, the triumphal pomp of Probus or Aurelian, and the secular games of the emperor Philip, acknowledged that they were all surpassed by the superior magnificence of Carinus.⁶⁶

The Amphitheater

The spectacles of Carinus may therefore be best illustrated by the observation of some particulars which history has condescended to relate concerning those of his predecessors. If we confine ourselves solely to the hunting of wild beasts—however we may censure the vanity of the design or the cruelty of the execution—we are obliged to confess that neither before nor since the time of the Romans so much art and expense have ever been lavished for the amusement of the people.⁶⁷ By the order of Probus, a

⁶³ *Cancellarius*. This word, so humble in its original, has risen to the title of the first great office of state in the monarchies of Europe by a singular fortune. Casaubon and Salmasius, ad Hist. August p. 263.

⁶⁴ Vopiscus in Hist. August.. pp. 253, 254. Eutropius, ix. 19. Victor Junior. The reign of Diocletian indeed was so long and prosperous that it must have been very unfavorable to the reputation of Carinus.

⁶⁵ Vopiscus in Hist. August. p. 254. He calls him Carus, but the sense is sufficiently obvious, and the words were often confounded.

⁶⁶ Calphurnius, Eclog. vii. 43. We may observe that the spectacles of Probus were still recent, and that the poet is seconded by the historian.

⁶⁷ The philosopher Montaigne (Essais, I. iii. 6) gives a very just and lively view of Roman magnificence in these

great quantity of large trees, torn up by the roots, were transplanted into the midst of the circus. The spacious and shady forest was immediately filled with a thousand ostriches, a thousand stags, a thousand fallow deer, and a thousand wild boars. All this variety of game was abandoned to the riotous impetuosity of the multitude. The tragedy of the succeeding day consisted in the massacre of a hundred lions, an equal number of lionesses, 200 leopards, and 300 bears. (Vopiscus in Hist. August. p. 240) The collection prepared by the younger Gordian for his triumph, and which his successor exhibited in the secular games, was less remarkable by the number than by the singularity of the animals. Twenty zebras displayed their elegant forms and variegated beauty to the eyes of the Roman people.⁶⁸ Ten elks, and as many giraffes, the loftiest and most harmless creatures that wander over the plains of Sarmatia and Ethiopia, were contrasted with 30 African hyenas, and 10 Indian tigers, the most implacable savages of the torrid zone. The unoffending strength with which Nature has endowed the greater quadrupeds was admired in the rhinoceros, the hippopotamus of the Nile,⁶⁹ and a majestic troop of 32 elephants.⁷⁰ While the populace gazed with stupid wonder on the splendid show, the naturalist might indeed observe the figure and properties of so many different species, transported from every part of the ancient world into the amphitheater of Rome. But this accidental benefit which science might derive from folly is surely insufficient to justify such a wanton abuse of the public riches. There occurs, however, a single instance in the first Punic war, in which the senate wisely connected this amusement of the multitude with the interest of the state. A considerable number of elephants, taken in the defeat of the Carthaginian army, were driven through the circus by a few slaves, armed only with blunt javelins. (Plin. Hist. Natur. viii. 6, from the annals of Piso) The useful spectacle served to impress the Roman soldier with a just contempt for those unwieldy animals; and he no longer dreaded to encounter them in the ranks of war.

The hunting or exhibition of wild beasts was conducted with a magnificence suitable to a people who styled themselves as masters of the world. Nor was the edifice appropriated to that entertainment less expressive of Roman greatness. Posterity admires, and will long admire, the awful remains of the amphitheater of Titus, which so well deserved the epithet of Colossal. (Maffei, Verona Illustrata, p. iv. 1. 1. c. 2) It was an elliptically-shaped building, 564 feet in length, and 467 feet wide, founded on 80 arches, and rising, with 4 successive orders of architecture, to the height of 140 feet.⁷¹ The outside of the edifice was covered with marble, and decorated with statues. The slopes of the vast concave which formed the inside were filled and surrounded with 60 or 80 rows of seats of marble likewise, covered with cushions, and easily capable of accommodating 80,000 spectators.⁷² Sixty-four “vomitories” (an apt name for these doors) poured forth the immense multitude. The entrances, passages, and staircases, were contrived with such exquisite skill that each person, be it senatorial, equestrian, or plebeian, arrived at their destined place without trouble or confusion.⁷³ Nothing was omitted, which, in any

spectacles.

⁶⁸ They are called *Onagri*; but the number is too inconsiderable for mere wild asses. Cuper (de Elephantia Exercitat. ii. 7) has proved from Oppian, Dion, and an anonymous Greek that zebras had been seen at Rome. They were brought from some island of the ocean, perhaps Madagascar.

⁶⁹ Carinus gave a hippopotamus (Caiphurn. Eclog. vii. 66). In the latter spectacles, I do not recollect any crocodiles, of which Augustus once exhibited thirty-six.—Dion Cassius, I. iv. p. 781.

⁷⁰ Capitolin. in Hist. August. pp. 164, 165. We are not acquainted with the animals whom he calls *archeleontes*, some read *argoleontes*, others *agrioleontes*: both corrections are very nugatory.

⁷¹ Maffei, 1. l. c. 2. The height was very much exaggerated by the ancients. It reached almost to the heavens, according to Caiphurnius (Eclog. vii. 23), and surpassed the ken of human sight, according to Ammianus Marcellinus (xvi. 10). Yet how trifling to the great pyramid of Egypt, which rises 500 feet perpendicular!

⁷² According to different copies of Victor, we read 77,000, or 87,000 spectators; but Maffei (1. ii. c. 12) finds room on the open seats for no more than 84,000. The remainder were contained in the upper covered galleries.

⁷³ Maffei, 1. ii. c. 5-12. He treats the very difficult subject with all possible clearness, and like an architect, as well as an antiquarian.

respect, could be subservient to the convenience and pleasure of the spectators. They were protected from the sun and rain by an ample canopy, occasionally drawn over their heads. The air was continually refreshed by the playing of fountains, and profusely impregnated by the grateful scent of aromatics. In the center of the edifice, the arena or stage was strewed with the finest sand, and successively assumed the most different forms. At one moment it seemed to rise out of the earth, like the garden of the Hesperides, and was afterward broken into the rocks and caverns of Thrace. The subterraneous pipes conveyed an inexhaustible supply of water; and what had just before appeared a level plain, might be suddenly converted into a wide lake, covered with armed vessels, and replenished with the monsters of the deep.⁷⁴ In the decoration of these scenes, the Roman emperors displayed their wealth and liberality. We read on various occasions that all of the amphitheater's furniture consisted either of silver, gold, or amber. (Consult Plin. *hist. Natur.* xxxiii. 16, xxxvii. 11) The poet who describes the games of Carinus, in the character of a shepherd attracted to the capital by the fame of their magnificence, affirms that the nets designed as a defense against the wild beasts were of gold wire. The porticoes were gilded, and that the belt or circle which divided the several ranks of spectators from each other was studded with a precious Mosaic of beautiful stones.⁷⁵

Secure of his fortune (AD 284, Sept. 12), the emperor Carinus, enjoyed the acclamations of the people, the flattery of his courtiers, and the songs of the poets in the midst of this glittering pageantry. For want of a better reason, they were reduced to celebrating the divine graces of his person.⁷⁶ In the same hour, only 900 miles from Rome, his brother expired; and a sudden revolution transferred into the hands of a stranger the scepter of the house of Carus.⁷⁷

The sons of Carus never saw each other after their father's death. The arrangements which their new situation required were probably deferred till the return of the younger brother to Rome. Here, a triumph was decreed to the young emperors for the glorious success of the Persian war.⁷⁸ It is uncertain whether they intended to divide between them the administration, or the provinces, of the empire; but it is very unlikely that their union would have proved of any long duration. The jealousy of power must have been inflamed by the opposition of characters. In the most corrupt of times, Carinus was unworthy to live. Numerian deserved to reign in a happier period. His affable manners and gentle virtues secured him, as soon as they became known, the regard and affections of the public. He possessed the elegant accomplishments of a poet and orator, which dignify as well as adorn the humblest and the most exalted station. His eloquence, however it was applauded by the senate, was formed not so much on the model of Cicero as on that of the modern declaimers. However, in an age very far from being destitute of poetical merit, he contended for the prize with the most celebrated of his contemporaries, and still remained the friend of his rivals. This was a circumstance which evinces either the goodness of his heart, or the superiority of his genius.⁷⁹ But the talents of Numerian were rather of the contemplative than of the active kind. When his father's elevation reluctantly forced him from the shade of retirement, neither his temper nor his pursuits had qualified him for the command of armies. His constitution was destroyed by the hardships of the Persian war; and he had contracted, from the heat of the climate,⁸⁰

⁷⁴ Calphurn. *Eclog.* vii. 64, 13. These lines are curious, and the whole *Eclogue* has been of infinite use to Maffei. Calphurnius, as well as Martial (first book), was a poet; but when they described the amphitheater, they both wrote from their own senses, and to those of the Romans.

⁷⁵ Latin text omitted.

⁷⁶ John Malela, who had perhaps seen pictures of Carinus, describes him as thick, short, and white, v. i. p. 403.

⁷⁷ With regard to the time when these Roman games were celebrated, Scaliger, Salmasius, and Cuper have given themselves a great deal of trouble to perplex a very clear subject.

⁷⁸ Nemesianus (in the *Cynegeticon*) seems to anticipate in his fancy that auspicious day.

⁷⁹ He won all the crowns from Nemesianus, with whom he vied in didactic poetry. The senate erected a statue to the son of Carus with a very ambiguous inscription, "To the most powerful of orators." Vopiscus in *Hist. August.* p. 251.

⁸⁰ A more natural cause, at least, than that assigned by Vopiscus (*Hist. August.* p. 251), incessantly weeping for his father's

such a weakness in his eyes as obliged him, in the course of a long retreat, to confine himself to the solitude and darkness of a tent or litter. The administration of all affairs, civil as well as military, was devolved on Arrius Aper, the Pretorian prefect, who, to the power of his important office, added the honor of being father-in-law to Numerian. The Imperial pavilion was strictly guarded by his most trusty adherents; and during many days, Aper delivered to the army the supposed mandates of their invisible sovereign.⁸¹

Death of Numerian

It was not, until 8 months after the death of Carus that the Roman army, returning by slow marches from the banks of the Tigris, arrived on those of the Thracian Bosphorus. The legions halted at Chalcedon in Asia, while the court passed over to Heraclea, on the European side of the Propontis.⁸² But a report soon circulated through the camp, at first in secret whispers, and at length in loud clamors, of the emperor's death, and of the presumption of his ambitious minister, who still exercised the sovereign power in the name of a prince who was no more. The impatience of the soldiers could not long support a state of suspense. In curiosity, they broke into the Imperial tent, and discovered only the corpse of Numerian.⁸³ The gradual decline of his health might have induced them to believe that his death was natural; but the concealment was interpreted as an evidence of guilt, and the measures which Aper had taken to secure his election became the immediate occasion of his ruin. Yet, even in the transport of their rage and grief, the troops observed a regular proceeding, which proves how firmly discipline had been re-established by the martial successors of Gallienus. A general assembly of the army was appointed to be held at Chalcedon, where Aper was transported in chains, as a prisoner and a criminal.

Election of Diocletian

A vacant tribunal was erected in the midst of the camp, and the generals and tribunes formed a great military council. They (AD 284, Sept. 17) soon announced to the multitude that their choice had fallen on Diocletian, commander of the domestics or bodyguards, as the person the most capable of revenging and succeeding their beloved emperor. The future fortunes of the candidate depended on the chance or conduct of the present hour. Conscious that the station which he had filled exposed him to some suspicions, Diocletian ascended the tribunal, and raising his eyes toward the Sun, made a solemn profession of his own innocence, in the presence of that all-seeing Deity. (Aurel. Victor. Eutrop. ix. 20; Hieronym. in Chron.) Then, assuming the tone of a sovereign and a judge, he commanded that Aper should be brought in chains to the foot of the tribunal. "This man," said he, "is the murderer of Numerian"; and, without giving him time to enter on a dangerous justification, drew his sword and buried it in the breast of the unfortunate prefect. A charge supported by such decisive proof was admitted without contradiction, and the legions with repeated acclamations acknowledged the justice and authority of the emperor Diocletian.⁸⁴

death.

⁸¹ In the Persian war, Aper was suspected of a design to betray Carus. Hist. August. p. 250.

⁸² We are obliged to the Alexandrian Chronicle, p. 274, for the knowledge of the time and place where Diocletian was elected emperor.

⁸³ Hist. August. p. 251. Eutrop. ix. 88. Hieronym. in Chron. According to these judicious writers, the death of Numerian was discovered by the stench of his dead body. Could no aromatics be found in the Imperial household?

⁸⁴ Vopiscus in Hist. August. p. 252. The reason why Diocletian killed Aper (a wild boar) was founded on a prophecy and a pun, as foolish as they are well known.

Death of Carinus

Before we enter upon the memorable reign of that prince, it will be proper to punish and dismiss the unworthy brother of Numerian. Carinus possessed arms and treasures sufficient to support his legal title to the empire. But his personal vices overbalanced every advantage of birth and situation. The most faithful servants of the father despised the incapacity, and dreaded the cruel arrogance, of the son. The hearts of the people were engaged in favor of his rival, and even the senate was inclined to prefer a usurper over a tyrant. Diocletian's machinations inflamed the general discontent; and the winter was employed in secret intrigues and open preparations for a civil war. In May (AD 285), the forces of the East and of the West encountered each other in the plains of Margus, a small city of Maesia, in the neighborhood of the Danube.⁸⁵ Having recently returned from the Persian war, the troops had acquired their glory at the expense of health and numbers, nor were they in a condition to contend with the unexhausted strength of the legions of Europe. Their ranks were broken, and for a moment Diocletian despaired of the purple and life itself. But the advantage which Carinus had obtained by the valor of his soldiers he quickly lost by the infidelity of his officers. A tribune, whose wife he had seduced, seized the opportunity of revenge, and by a single blow extinguished civil discord in the blood of the adulterer.⁸⁶

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⁸⁵ Eutropius marks its situation very accurately; it was between the Mons Aureus and Viminiacum. M. d'Anville (*Geographic Ancienne*, v. i. p. 304) places Margus at Kastolatz in Servia, a little below Belgrade and Semendria.

⁸⁶ *Hist. August.* p. 254 Eutropius, pp. 9, 20. Aurelius Victor. Victor in Epitome.