

www.e-rara.ch

The History Of The Decline And Fall Of The Roman Empire

Gibbon, Edward

Basil, M D CC LXXXVII[-M DCC LXXXIX]

Universitätsbibliothek Basel

Shelf Mark: UBH AO II 16-28

Persistent Link: <https://doi.org/10.3931/e-rara-87770>

Chap. XII.

www.e-rara.ch

Die Plattform e-rara.ch macht die in Schweizer Bibliotheken vorhandenen Drucke online verfügbar. Das Spektrum reicht von Büchern über Karten bis zu illustrierten Materialien – von den Anfängen des Buchdrucks bis ins 20. Jahrhundert.

e-rara.ch provides online access to rare books available in Swiss libraries. The holdings extend from books and maps to illustrated material – from the beginnings of printing to the 20th century.

e-rara.ch met en ligne des reproductions numériques d'imprimés conservés dans les bibliothèques de Suisse. L'éventail va des livres aux documents iconographiques en passant par les cartes – des débuts de l'imprimerie jusqu'au 20e siècle.

e-rara.ch mette a disposizione in rete le edizioni antiche conservate nelle biblioteche svizzere. La collezione comprende libri, carte geografiche e materiale illustrato che risalgono agli inizi della tipografia fino ad arrivare al XX secolo.

Nutzungsbedingungen Dieses Digitalisat kann kostenfrei heruntergeladen werden. Die Lizenzierungsart und die Nutzungsbedingungen sind individuell zu jedem Dokument in den Titelinformationen angegeben. Für weitere Informationen siehe auch [Link]

Terms of Use This digital copy can be downloaded free of charge. The type of licensing and the terms of use are indicated in the title information for each document individually. For further information please refer to the terms of use on [Link]

Conditions d'utilisation Ce document numérique peut être téléchargé gratuitement. Son statut juridique et ses conditions d'utilisation sont précisés dans sa notice détaillée. Pour de plus amples informations, voir [Link]

Condizioni di utilizzo Questo documento può essere scaricato gratuitamente. Il tipo di licenza e le condizioni di utilizzo sono indicate nella notizia bibliografica del singolo documento. Per ulteriori informazioni vedi anche [Link]

CHAP. XII.

Conduct of the Army and Senate after the Death of Aurelian. — Reigns of Tacitus, Probus, Carus, and his Sons.

CHAP.
XII.
Extraordi-
nary con-
test be-
tween the
army and
the senate
for the
choice of
an empe-
ror.

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 crime 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

„ our loss, shall ever reign over us ? ” 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 honours 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 seditions, 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.

The contention that ensued is one of the best attested, but most improbable events in the history of mankind *. The troops, as if satiated with the exercise of power, again conjured the senate to

Vol. II.

D

A. D. 275.
Feb. 3.
A peaceful
interreg-
num of
eight
months.

50 THE DECLINE AND FALL

CHAP.
XII.

invest one of its own body 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 whilst the obstinate modesty of either party was resolved to receive a master from the hands of the other, eight months insensibly elapsed: an amazing period of tranquil anarchy, during which the Roman world remained without a sovereign, without an 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 interregnum.

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 during twelve 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; and the balance of freedom was easily preserved in a small and virtuous community¹. The decline of the Roman state, far different from its infancy, was attended with every circumstance that could banish from an interregnum 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 flower of the legions 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; and 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 vigour.

On the twenty-fifth of September, near eight months after the murder of Aurelian, 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 farther 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 sceptre to the sanctity

A. D. 275.
Sept. 25.
The consul
assembles
the senate.

CHAP.
XII.

of the Roman laws. The consul then addressing himself to Tacitus, the first of the senators⁴, required his opinion on the important subject of a proper candidate for the vacant throne.

Character
of Tacitus.

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 mankind⁵. The senator Tacitus was then seventy-five years of age⁶. The long period of his innocent life was adorned with wealth and honours. He had twice been invested with the consular dignity⁷, and enjoyed with elegance and sobriety his ample patrimony of between two and three millions sterling⁸. The experience of so many princes, whom he had esteemed or endured, from the vain follies of Elagabalus to the useful rigour of Aurelian, taught him to form a just estimate of the duties, the dangers, and the temptations, of their sublime station. From the assiduous study of his immortal ancestor he derived the knowledge of the Roman constitution, and of human nature⁹. The voice of the people had already named Tacitus as the citizen the most worthy of empire. The ungrateful rumour reached his ears, and induced him to seek the retirement of one of his villas in Campania. He had passed two months in the delightful privacy of Baïæ, when he reluctantly obeyed the summons of the consul to resume his honourable 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 chuse thee for our sovereign, „ to thy care we intrust 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 honour, and to express his wonder, that they should elect his age and infirmities to succeed the martial vigour of Aurelian. „ Are „ these limbs, conscript fathers! fitted to sustain „ the weight of armour, or to practise 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 most tender management. My exhausted „ strength scarcely enables me to discharge the „ duty of a senator; how insufficient would it „ prove to the arduous labours of war and govern- „ ment? 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 favourable opinion of the senate¹⁰? ”

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

CHAP.

XII.

He is elect-
ed empe-
ror.and ac-
cepts the
purple.

CHAP.
XII.

very advanced season of life; that the mind, not the body, a sovereign, not a soldier, was the object of their choice; and that they expected from him no more than to guide by his wisdom the valour of the legions. These pressing though tumultuary 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, congratulated them on the election of a virtuous and experienced senator, and, 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 Prætorian guards¹¹.

Authority
of the se-
nate.

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 laws¹². 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

not be useless to recapitulate some of the most important prerogatives which the senate appeared to have regained by the election of Tacitus¹³.

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 favour 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 præfect 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 service¹⁴.

Circular epistles were sent, without delay, to all the principal cities of the empire, Treves, Milan, Aquileia, Theſſalonica, Corinth, Athens,

Their joy
and confi-
dence.

CHAP.
XII.

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. „ Cast away your indolence, ” it is thus that one of the senators addresses his friend, „ emerge from „ your retirements of Baiaæ and Puteoli. Give your „ self 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 ”. These lofty expectations were, however, soon disappointed; nor, indeed, was it possible, that the armies and the provinces should long obey the luxurious and unwarlike 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 lustre, blazed for a moment, and was extinguished for ever.

A. D. 276. All that had yet 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,

Tacitus is
acknow-
ledged by
the army.

and was there, by the Prætorian præfect, presented to the assembled troops, as the prince whom they themselves had demanded, and whom the senate had bestowed. As soon as the præfect 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 donative. 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 ¹⁶.

CHAP.
XII.

Whilst the deceased emperor was making preparations for a second expedition into the East, he had negociated with the Alani, a Scythian people, who pitched their tents in the neighbourhood of the lake Mæotis. 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 their interregnum, exercised a doubtful authority, were unprepared either to receive or to oppose them. Provoked by such treatment, which they considered as trifling and perfidious, the Alani had recourse to their own valour 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,

The Alani
invade
Asia, and
are repuls-
ed by Tac-
itus.

CHAP.
XII.

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 invasion¹⁷.

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 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 prince¹⁸. It is certain, that their insolence was the cause of his death. He expired at Tyana in Cappadocia, after a reign of only six months and about twenty days¹⁹.

CHAP.
XII.

A. D. 276.
April 12.

Usurpation
and death
of his brother
Florianus.

The eyes of Tacitus were scarcely closed, before his brother Florianus shewed 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,

CHAP.
XII.

July.

Their family subsists in obscurity.

Character and elevation of the emperor Probus.

where the summer proved remarkably unwholesome. Their numbers were diminished by frequent desertion, the passes of the mountains were feebly defended; Tarsus opened its gates, and the soldiers of Florianus, when they had permitted him to enjoy the Imperial title about three months, delivered the empire from civil war by the easy sacrifice of a prince whom they despised ²⁰.

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 ²¹, 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, that 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 ²².

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 ²³. Above twenty years before, the emperor Valerian,

with his usual penetration, had discovered the rising merit of the young foldier, on whom he 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; and deserved to receive from the emperor's hand the collars, bracelets, spears, and banners, the mural and the civic crown, and all the honourable rewards reserved by ancient Rome for successful valour. The third, and afterwards the tenth, legion were intrusted to the command of Probus, who, in every step of his promotion, shewed 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 age²⁴; in the full possession of his fame, of the love of the army, and of a mature vigour of mind and body.

CHAP.

XII.

His respectful
conduct
towards
the senate.

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 me²¹. „ His dutiful address to the senate displayed the sentiments, or at least the language, of a Roman patriot: „ When „ you elected one of 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 favour, 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 merits²⁶. „

A. D. 276.

August 3.

When 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 sceptre 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 Cæsar and Augustus, the title of Father of his country, the right of making in the same day three motions in the senate ²⁷, 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 honour of the Roman arms, and often laid at their feet crowns of gold and barbaric trophies, the fruits of his numerous victories ²⁸. Yet, whilst he gratified their vanity, he must secretly have 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 employments. They soon experienced, that those who refuse the sword, must renounce the sceptre.

The strength of Aurelian had crushed on every side the enemies of Rome. After his death they seemed to revive with an increase of fury and of numbers. They were again vanquished by the active vigour of Probus, who, in a short reign of about six years ²⁹, equalled the fame of ancient heroes, and restored peace and order to every

Victories
of Probus
over the
barba-
rians.

CHAP.
XII.

province of the Roman world. The dangerous frontier of Rhætia 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 emperor³⁰. He attacked the Isaurians in their mountains, besieged and took several of their strongest castles³¹, and flattered himself that he had for ever 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 Coptos, 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 Persia³², and the Great King sued in vain for the friendship of Probus. Most of the exploits which distinguished his reign, were atchieved by the personal valour and conduct of the emperor, insomuch that the writer of his life expresses some amazement how, in so short a time, a single man could be present in so many distant wars. The remaining actions he intrusted to the care of his lieutenants, the judicious choice of whom forms no inconsiderable part of his glory. Carus, Diocletian, Maximian, Constantius, Galerius, Asclepiodatus, Annibalianus, and a crowd of other chiefs, who afterwards ascended or supported the throne, were trained

trained to arms in the severe school of Aurelian and Probus³³.

CHAP.
XII.

A. D. 277.
He delivers Gaul from the invasion of the Germans,

But the most important service which Probus rendered to the republic, was the deliverance of Gaul, and the recovery of seventy flourishing cities oppressed by the barbarians of Germany, who, since the death of Aurelian, had ravaged that great province with impunity³⁴. 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 valour of Probus. He drove back the Franks into their morasses; a descriptive circumstance from whence we may infer, that the confederacy known by the manly appellation of *Free*, already occupied the flat maritime country, intersected and almost overflowed 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 attempted to elude that article of the treaty. Their punishment was immediate and terrible³⁵. 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 Silesia³⁶. In the Lygian nation, the Arii held the first rank by their num-

CHAP.
XII.

bers and fierceness. "The Aarii (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
 "chuse for the combat the darkest hour of the
 "night. Their host advances, covered as it were
 "with a funereal shade³⁷; 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 battle³⁸." Yet
 the arms and discipline of the Romans easily dis-
 comfited 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 honourable 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 four hundred thousand of
 the invaders; a work of labour to the Romans,
 and of expence to the emperor, who gave a piece
 of gold for the head of every barbarian³⁹. But as
 the fame of warriors is built on the destruction
 of human kind, we may naturally suspect, that
 the sanguinary account was multiplied by the
 avarice of the soldiers, and accepted without any

very severe examination by the liberal vanity of Probus.

CHAP.
XII.

Since the expedition of Maximin, 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 Gallic victories, passed the Rhine, and displayed his invincible eagles on the banks of the Elbe and the Necker. 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

and carries his arms into Germany.

CHAP.
XII.

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 *. Had Germany been reduced into the state of a province, the Romans, with immense labour and expence, would have acquired only a more extensive boundary to defend against the fiercer and more active barbarians of Scythia.

He builds
a wall
from the
Rhine to
the Da-
nube.

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 *. 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 tythes, the majesty of the empire *. 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 defence began to be practised, these garrisons were connected and covered by a strong intrenchment of trees and palisades. In the place of so rude a bulwark, the emperor Probus constructed a stone-wall of a considerable height, and strengthened it by towers at convenient distances. From the neighbourhood of Newstadt and Ratisbon on the Danube, it stretched across hills,

vallies, 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 near two hundred miles ⁴³. 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 ⁴⁴. 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 Dæmon, now serve only to excite the wonder of the Swabian peasant.

Among the useful conditions of peace imposed by Probus on the vanquished nations of Germany, was the obligation of supplying the Roman army with sixteen thousand 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 fifty or sixty

Introduc-
tion and
settlement
of the bar-
barians.

CHAP.
XII.

each, among the national troops; judiciously observing, that the aid which the republic derived from the barbarians, should be felt but not seen⁴⁵. Their aid was now become necessary. The feeble elegance of Italy and the internal provinces could no longer support the weight of arms. The hardy frontier of the Rhine and Danube still produced minds and bodies equal to the labours 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 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 whom he bestowed lands, cattle, instruments of husbandry, 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 Cambridgeshire⁴⁶, 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 state⁴⁷. Great numbers of Franks and Gepidæ were settled on the banks of the Danube and the Rhine. An hundred thousand Bastarnæ, expelled from their own country, cheerfully accepted an establishment in Thrace, and soon imbibed the manners and sentiments of Roman subjects⁴⁸. But the expectations of Probus were too often disap-

pointed. The impatience and idleness of the barbarians could ill brook the slow labours of agriculture. Their unconquerable love of freedom, rising against despotism, provoked them into hasty rebellions, alike fatal to themselves and to the provinces⁴⁹; nor could these artificial supplies, however repeated by succeeding emperors, restore the important limit of Gaul and Illyricum to its ancient and native vigour.

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 sea-coast of Pontus, with a view of strengthening the frontier against the inroads of the Alani. A fleet stationed in one of the harbours 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

CHAP.
XV.

Daring enter-
prise of
the Franks.

CHAP.
XII.

a handful of barbarians, who massacred the greatest 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 *. 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.

Revolt of
Saturni-
nus 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 favourable 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 people, the pressing instances of his friends, and his own fears; but from the moment of his elevation, 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 per- „ petually 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 ¹¹. „ 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 ¹². 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 sanguine, than those of their experienced leader.

A. D. 279.

The revolt of Saturninus was scarcely extinguished in the East, before new troubles were excited in the West, by the rebellion of Bonofus 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 ¹³, yet neither of them were destitute of courage and capacity, and both sustained, with honour, the august character which the fear of punishment had engaged them to assume, till

A. D. 280.
of Bonofus and
Proculus
in Gaul.

CHAP.
XII.

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 families⁵⁴.

A. D. 281.
Triumph
of the em-
peror Pro-
bus.

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, a tyrant, or even a robber, to revive the memory of past disorders. It was time that the emperor should revisit Rome, and celebrate his own glory and the general happiness. The triumph due to the valour 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 successor⁵⁵. We cannot, on this occasion, forget the desperate courage of about fourscore Gladiators, reserved with near six hundred others, for the inhuman sports of the amphitheatre. 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; but they obtained at least an honourable death, and the satisfaction of a just revenge⁵⁶.

His disci-
pline.

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 labours. When Probus commanded in Egypt, he executed many considerable works for the splendour 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, as engineers, and as husbandmen⁵⁷. 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 Africa⁵⁸. From a similar principle, Probus exercised his legions in covering, with rich vineyards, the hills of Gaul and Pannonia, and two considerable spots are described, which were entirely dug and planted by military labour⁵⁹. 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 endeavoured 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.

But in the prosecution of a favourite 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

His death.

CHAP.
XII.

A. D. 282.
August.

Election
and cha-
racter of
Carus.

consult the patience and disposition of his fierce legionaries⁶⁰. 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 labours 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 force⁶¹. The unguarded expression proved fatal to him. In one of the hottest days of summer, as he severely urged the unwholesome labour 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 work⁶². The tower was instantly forced, and 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 honourable monument, the memory of his virtues and victories⁶³.

When the legions had indulged their grief and repentance for the death of Probus, their unanimous

consent declared Carus, his Prætorian præfect, 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 Africa⁶⁴. 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 favour 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 abilities⁶⁵; but his austere temper insensibly 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 tyrants⁶⁶. When Carus assumed the purple, he was about sixty years of age, and his two sons Carinus and Numerian had already attained the season of manhood⁶⁷.

CHAP.
XII.

The senti-
ments of
the senate
and peo-
ple.

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 throne⁶⁶. A behaviour so very opposite to that of his amiable predecessor, afforded no favourable presage of the new reign; and the Romans, deprived of power and freedom, asserted their privilege of licentious murmurs⁶⁷. 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 noon-tide heat, retire into the cave of Faunus. On a spreading beech they discover some recent characters. The rural deity had described, in prophetic verses, the felicity 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 age⁶⁸.

Carus de-
feats the
Sarma-
tians, 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. Before his departure for this distant expedition,

Carus conferred on his two sons, Carinus and Numerian, the title of Cæsar, and investing the former with almost an equal share of the Imperial power, directed the young prince, first to suppress some troubles which had arisen in Gaul, and afterwards to fix the seat of his residence at Rome, and to assume the government of the western provinces⁷¹. 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.

The successor of Artaxerxes, Varanes or Bahram, though he had subdued the Segeftans, one of the most warlike nations of Upper Asia⁷², was alarmed at the approach of the Romans, and endeavoured to retard their progress by a negociation of peace. His ambassadors entered the camp about sun-set, at the time when the troops were satisfying their hunger with a frugal repast. 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

A. D. 283.
he gives
audience
to the Per-
sian am-
bassadors.

CHAP.
XII.

piece of stale bacon and a few hard pease composed his supper. A coarse woollen 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 hair⁷. 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.

His victo-
ries and
extraordi-
nary 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 Ctesiphon (which seemed to have surrendered without resistance), and carried his victorious arms beyond the Tigris⁸. He had seized the favourable moment for an invasion. The Persian councils were distracted by domestic factions, and the greater part of their forces were 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 colours, the fall of Persia, the conquest of Arabia, the submission of Egypt, and a lasting deliverance from the inroads of the Scythian nations⁹. But the reign of Carus was destined

destined to expose the vanity of predictions. They were scarcely uttered before they were contradicted by his death; an event attended with such ambiguous circumstances, that it may best be related in a letter from his own secretary to the præfect of the city. „Carus,” says he, “our dearest emperor, „ was confined by sickness to his bed, when a „ furious tempest arose in the camp. The 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; and 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.”

CHAP.
XII.
A. D. 283.
Dec. 25.

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”. But the legions, however strong in numbers and discipline,

He is succeeded by his two sons Carinus and Numerian.

CHAP.

XII.

were dismayed by the most abject superstition. Notwithstanding all the arts that were practised 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 Heaven⁷⁸. 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 to 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 enemy⁷⁹.

A. D. 364.
Vices of
Carinus.

The intelligence of the mysterious fate of the late emperor, was soon carried from the frontiers of Persia to Rome; and the senate, as well as the provinces, congratulated the accession 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; and his death, which happened about sixteen months afterwards, left them the unexpected legacy of a vast empire. To sustain with temper this rapid elevation, an uncommon

share of virtue and prudence was requisite; and Carinus, the elder of the brothers, was more than commonly deficient in those qualities. In the Gallic war, he discovered some degree of personal courage⁸⁹; but from the moment of his arrival at Rome, 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; and notwithstanding this legal inconstancy, found time to indulge such a variety of irregular appetites, as brought dishonour 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 counsellors whom his father had placed about him, to guide his inexperienced youth; and 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 demeanour, frequently declaring, that he designed to distribute their estates among the populace of Rome. From the dregs of that populace, he selected his favourites, 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. One of his door-keepers⁹¹ he

CHAP.
XII.

intrusted with the government of the city. In the room of the Prætorian præfect, 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 favour, 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 leaving 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 controul of fear or decency, he displayed to the Romans the extravagancies of Elagabalus, aggravated by the cruelty of Domitian²².

He celebrates the Roman games.

The only merit of the administration of Carinus that history could record or poetry celebrate, was the uncommon splendour with which, in his own and his brother's name, he exhibited the Roman games of the theatre, the circus, and the amphitheatre. More than twenty years afterwards, 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 pleasure³³. 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 Carinus³⁴.

CHAP.
XII.

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 expence have ever been lavished for the amusement of the people³⁵. By the order of Probus, a 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; and 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 an hundred lions, an equal

Spectacles
of Rome.

CHAP.
XII.

number of lionesses, two hundred leopards, and three hundred bears ⁸⁶. 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 ⁸⁷. Ten elks, and as many camelopards, the loftiest and most harmless creatures that wander over the plains of Sarmatia and Ethiopia, were contrasted with thirty African hyænas, and ten Indian tygers, 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 ⁸⁸, and a majestic troop of thirty-two elephants ⁸⁹. 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 amphitheatre 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 ⁹⁰. 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.

CHAP.
XII.

The hunting or exhibition of wild beasts, was conducted with a magnificence suitable to a people who styled themselves the 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 amphitheatre of Titus, which so well deserved the epithet of Colossal²¹. It was a building of an elliptic figure, five hundred and sixty-four feet in length, and four hundred and sixty-seven in breadth, founded on fourscore arches, and rising, with four successive orders of architecture, to the height of one hundred and forty feet²². The outside of the edifice was encrusted with marble, and decorated with statues. The slopes of the vast concave, which formed the inside, were filled and surrounded with sixty or eighty rows of seats of marble likewise, covered with cushions, and capable of receiving with ease above fourscore thousand spectators²³. Sixty-four *vomitores* (for by that name the doors were very aptly distinguished) poured forth the immense multitude; and the entrances, passages, and stair-cases, were contrived with such exquisite skill, that each person, whether of the senatorial, the equestrian, or the plebeian order, arrived at his destined place without trouble or confusion²⁴. Nothing was omitted which, in any respect, could be subservient to the convenience and pleasure of the spectators. They were protected from the sun and rain by an ample canopy, occa-

The amphitheatre.

88 THE DECLINE AND FALL

CHAP.
XII.

fionally 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 centre 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 afterwards 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 deep⁵⁵. In the decoration of these scenes, the Roman emperors displayed their wealth and liberality; and we read on various occasions, that the whole furniture of the amphitheatre consisted either of silver, or of gold, or of amber⁵⁶. 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 defence against the wild beasts, were of gold wire; that 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 stones⁵⁷.

A. D. 284
Sept. 12.

In the midst of this glittering pageantry, the emperor Carinus, secure of his fortune, enjoyed the acclamations of the people, the flattery of his courtiers, and the songs of the poets, who, for want of a more essential merit, were reduced to

celebrate the divine graces of his person ⁹⁹. In the same hour, but at the distance of nine hundred miles from Rome, his brother expired; and a sudden revolution transferred into the hands of a stranger the sceptre of the house of Carus ⁹⁹.

CHAP.
XII.

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, where a triumph was decreed to the young emperors, for the glorious success of the Persian war ¹⁰⁰. 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; but 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; a circumstance which evinces either the goodness of his heart, or the superiority of his genius ¹⁰¹. But the talents of Numerian were

Return of
Numerian
with the
army from
Persia.

CHAP.
XII.

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 ¹⁰², 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 Prætorian præfect, who, to the power of his important office, added the honour 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 ¹⁰³.

Death of
Numerian.

It was not till eight 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 ¹⁰⁴. But a report soon circulated through the camp; at first in secret whispers, and at length in loud clamours, 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. With rude curiosity they broke into the Imperial tent, and discovered only the corpse of Numerian ¹⁰⁵.

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, whither Aper was transported in chains, as a prisoner and a criminal. A vacant tribunal was erected in the midst of the camp , and the generals and tribunes formed a great military council. They soon announced to the multitude, that their choice had fallen on Diocletian , commander of the domestics or body-guards, 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 towards the Sun, made a solemn profession of his own innocence , in the presence of that all-seeing Deity ". 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 præfect. A charge supported by such decisive proof , was

CHAP.
XII.

A. D. 284.
Sept. 17.
Election of
the emperor
Diocle-
tian.

CHAP.
XII.Defeat and
death of
Carinus.A. D. 285.
May.

admitted without contradiction, and the legions, with repeated acclamations, acknowledged the justice and authority of the emperor Diocletian¹⁰⁷.

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 favour of his rival, and even the senate was inclined to prefer an usurper to a tyrant. The arts of Diocletian inflamed the general discontent; and the winter was employed in secret intrigues, and open preparations for a civil war. In the spring, the forces of the East and of the West encountered each other in the plains of Margus, a small city of Mæsia, in the neighbourhood of the Danube¹⁰⁸. The troops, so lately returned from the Persian war, had acquired their glory at the expence 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 of life. But the advantage which Carinus had obtained by the valour 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 adulterer¹⁰⁹.