

I

THE IMPERIAL POWER IN THE THIRD CENTURY

IN THE account of the period from the accession of the Emperor Diocletian to the death of Constantine the Great which lies before us, each section might well demand its own introduction, for events will be narrated not chronologically and by reigns but according to prevailing movements. But if a general introduction to the entire work be wanted, its principal content must be a history of the changing concepts of the character and function of the Emperor during the decline of the Roman Empire in the third century A.D. And this not because all other aspects of history may be derived from the character of the imperial office; but changes in that character do provide a basis for judging a multitude of events, external as well as spiritual, in the period following. Every form and degree which a rule based on force may assume, from the most frightful to the most beneficent, is here to be met with in remarkable alternation. Under the good Emperors of the second century, from Nerva to Marcus Aurelius (96-180 A.D.), the Roman Empire enjoyed an era of peace, which might have been an era of happiness as well if the profound malaise common to aging nations could have been reached by the benevolence and wisdom of even the best of rulers. The great stature, as men and as rulers, of a Trajan, a Hadrian, an Antoninus, or a Marcus Aurelius must not blind us to situations and conditions which had become patent to all. It was inevitable that the three great forces — Emperor, Senate, and Army — must again

eventually confound one another and lose the harmony which had been painstakingly preserved. In the sequel the confusion seemed wholly irremediable when barbarian incursions, stirrings in the provinces, and natural catastrophes combined to contribute to it.

A prelude is offered by the reign of Marcus Aurelius himself. To speak of that Emperor's personality is superfluous; among the imperishable ideal figures of antiquity the Stoic philosopher seated upon the throne of the world is not the fairest or most youthful, but surely one of the most admirable. And yet he was not spared the menacing sound of harbingers of doom, pounding at the gates of the Empire. First, with regard to the imperial office itself, it became clearly apparent that, despite the system of adoptions which had linked the four great Emperors to one another, that office might be usurped by a coup. Avidius Cassius, the most important general of the realm, ventured such a coup, though unsuccessfully, after the Empire had enjoyed almost three generations of excellent or at least benevolent rule. As regards the army, Marcus Aurelius was reputed "never to have flattered the soldiers in speech and never to have done aught out of fear of them"; nevertheless Marcus acquiesced in the traditional abuse of bestowing a huge donative upon the army at his accession, and to such a degree that each soldier (at least those of the Guard) acquired a fortune, and that the soldiers thereafter regarded that amount as a norm. Of external misfortunes there must be reckoned the first violent incursion of a Germanic-Sarmatian tribal federation into the Empire, and a fearful pestilence. The Emperor's last years were filled with perilous war and deep anxiety. But even in his tent on the Danube he sought to raise himself above the cares and threats of the moment by the quiet cultivation of virtue and of the divine in the life of man.

For his son Commodus (180-192) Marcus is said to have instituted a kind of regency, "the best of the Senate"; at least during his first weeks the young ruler accepted the guidance of his father's friends. But very quickly he developed that repulsive imperial madness to which men had grown unaccus-

tomed since the days of Domitian. Consciousness of dominion over the world and fear of all who might covet his rule begot an urge to quick enjoyment of what was his and to drown anxiety that gave no respite. In a character wanting native firmness such pressures soon evoked a combination of blood-thirstiness and voluptuousness. Occasion was provided by an attempt upon his life, of which his own family was not innocent but which was blamed upon the Senate. It was small wonder that the Prefect of the Guard soon became the first personage in the state and responsible for the life of the Emperor, as had been the case under Tiberius and Claudius, and that the few thousands which he commanded shared his feeling of being masters of the realm. One of these prefects indeed, the energetic Perennis, Commodus made a victim to a deputation of the disaffected Britannic army which, fifteen hundred strong, had made their way to Rome without hindrance. His successor, the Prefect Cleander, Commodus yielded to a hunger riot of the Roman populace; not, to be sure, without cause, for Cleander in his prodigious greed had not only antagonized the upper classes by confiscations and sale of public offices but had incurred the anger of the poor by a monopoly of grain.

When the cowardly and cruel ruler, dressed as a god, appeared in the amphitheater to be admired by the Senate which lived in constant peril of death, one might well ask whether this "Commodian Senate" deserved the old title, even though it still participated to some degree in provincial administration and the nomination of officials, and still possessed its own treasury and its external distinctions. Indeed it could hardly longer be called Roman, in the stricter sense, for the majority of its members were perhaps not even Italians, but provincials in whose families the dignity had sometimes become hereditary. From an ideal point of view it is easy to condemn this degenerate assembly in the severest terms, particularly since it is difficult to conceive clearly the effect of the deadly peril which hovered constantly over families and groups. Contemporaries judged more leniently. When Clodius Albinus refused to accept the dignity of Caesar at the bloody hands of Com-

modus he still regarded the Senate as sufficiently vital to favor the restoration of a republican constitution in a public harangue to his troops. Whether he was sincere is not to the point; it is enough that the Senate (as we shall see) still contained many of the noblest characters of the period and in times of stress displayed energy and decision in administration. Even the illusions under which we shall see it labor are not altogether to its discredit. Despite the intrusion of unworthy individuals, then, it is easy to understand that the Senate continued to be looked upon as the representative if not of the Empire at least of Roman society, and that it regarded itself as the natural sponsor of the so-called *Senates* or *Curias* of the provincial cities. It was still impossible to conceive of Rome without the Senate, even if its effectiveness seemed to be destroyed over long periods by violence from without.

After Commodus had further pillaged the senators in order to assuage the murmuring populace of the capital by monstrous gifts, he succumbed to an ordinary palace conspiracy.

The alarming aspect of imperial succession at Rome was the fact that no one knew precisely where the responsibility for raising a new Emperor lay. No dynasty could be established because the imperial madness — the fate of all the incumbents who were not especially gifted — compelled periodic revolution. Even aside from revolution, the childlessness of the dissolute Emperors and even of some among the better ones made a regular succession impossible. The practice of adoption went back to the house of Augustus, but adoptions could hope for recognition only if the adoptive father as well as the new son possessed the qualities requisite to make them effective.

Historically, the right to nominate the new Emperor obviously resided in the Senate, which had decreed one title of power after another to the divine Augustus. But when the Emperors came to hate the Senate and to rely exclusively upon the Guard, the latter assumed the right of election; and it was not long before the armies in the provinces competed with the barracks of the Praetorian camp at Rome. Soon the advantage of short reigns came to be appreciated, because the

donative to the camp became more frequent. Another element was the shady intrigue of determined men whose interest might at times induce them to support a pretender whose early fall they both foresaw and desired.

Thus the murderers of Commodus put forward Helvius Pertinax, a sound man, as if to justify their deed; and Pertinax was acknowledged first by the soldiers and then by the Senate (193). By a show of favor to a certain Triarius Maternus the Guards extorted an enormous donative from Pertinax, to meet which Commodus' valuables had to be disposed of. The natural consequence was a second attempt, in favor of the Consul Falco. The third time the Guards began straightway with the murder of the Emperor. And now there ensued in the camp that unexampled auction of the imperial dignity. There was found a rich fool, Didius Julianus, who, for a sum in excess of one thousand dollars paid to each soldier, purchased for himself a few weeks of debauchery and terror. But this was the last and highest pinnacle of Praetorian presumption. Simultaneously three provincial armies gave themselves the pleasure of proclaiming their leaders Emperor, and among them was the gloomy African, Septimius Severus. Feckless Julian's first recourse was to dispatch assassins; there was an officer named Aquilius who had often been employed for murder in high places and who enjoyed a reputation like Locusta's in Nero's day. Then, because he had paid good money for the realm, Julian tried to negotiate a business deal with Severus. When Severus drew nearer Julianus declared him co-regent; but he was deserted and scorned and at the instance of the Senate executed while Severus was still several days' march from Rome.

Septimius Severus (193-211) is the first representative of thorough military rule. There is something un-Roman, something modern, in the pride of military profession and rank which he displayed even as a legate. The slight appreciation and esteem he would show the ancient majesty of the Senate might be apprehended by the deputation of a hundred senators which went to greet him at Terni, and whom he caused to be searched straightway to see whether they carried dag-

gers. But his clearest manifestation of military logic was his disarming and disgracing of the Praetorians and his banishing them from Rome. His system had no room for a privileged and corrupted Guard with political pretensions. His own army, which he had brought with him, he gave only a fifth of the requested donative. Severus was equally consistent in his campaign against his rivals, Pescennius Niger and Clodius Albinus, and extirpated all their following. It was inconceivable to him that a number of senators could have been in correspondence with them and even that the Senate as a whole could have been neutral. "It was I who gave the city grain, I who waged many wars for the state, I who gave oil to the people of Rome," he wrote to the Senate; "a fine requital truly you have made me, a fine expression of thanks!" The Senate, he continued, had greatly degenerated since the time of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius.

Despite its importance and its indispensable military significance as a stronghold against the barbarians of Pontus, Byzantium, where Pescennius' followers had defended themselves for a year, was razed to the ground, and its garrison, along with many of its inhabitants, was put to death. The world must be given an example of the fate of cities and factions which could not immediately choose among a number of rival usurpers that one who deserved enduring obedience.

Albinus' followers fared no better. Severus had come into possession of their correspondence; he might have burned the letters unread, as Caesar had burned the letters of the Pompeians. That would have been a generous gesture, but altogether unsuitable to the times; the question was no longer one of divergent principles and their amalgamation through reconciliation and persuasion, but simply of subjection. A crowd of senators and other notables in and out of Rome were executed; the Emperor delivered eulogies of Commodus before the Senate, people, and army, surely not out of conviction but in mockery of the Senate. In Rome itself, during this struggle for dominion, a spontaneous lamenting and wailing once broke out at the Circus games; an eyewitness could find no explanation for the phenomenon other than divine inspiration. "O

Rome, Queen, Immortal," the multitudes shouted with a single voice, "how long shall we suffer these things, how long will war be waged over us?" Ignorance of their future was the happier lot.

When peace was restored at home it became apparent that the military rule, with its necessary corollary of foreign war, had become an end in itself. The center of this rule was Severus, with his family, of whom he wished to form a dynasty, distributed over the highest offices; only his brother, who would very willingly have shared the rule, did Severus carefully keep at a distance. The first step for asserting power was the organization of a new Guard, which was more than four times the strength of the old. With such a personal force constantly available, quite a different posture could be assumed toward the provincial armies. With such a force, as events proved, one might travel about in the Empire and murder and pillage everywhere. The former Guard had consisted of Italians, and preferably of men from the region of Rome; now Severus filled Rome with the faces of rude and frightening barbarians. If his donative was meager, Severus raised the regular pay of the soldier higher than any other Emperor had done; instead of flinging away several millions at once, now there was a constant drain on the Empire for the benefit of the soldiers. The fatherly advice which Severus is said to have offered his sons seems to be rather a contemporary comment on Severus' administration than an actual utterance of the Emperor, but it is significant nevertheless: "Be united, enrich the soldiers, despise all others."

One might expect that a professional soldiery so highly esteemed and kept constantly on the alert by an active general would be a credit to the glorious military past of Rome. But this was not the case. Severus himself complained loudly concerning the deterioration of discipline, and in his great Asiatic campaign there were cases of insubordination which he was able to meet only by leniency and additional gifts. Could Severus have blinded himself to the fact that his innovations secured only himself and his own reign, and that they must inevitably bring destruction upon a weak and evil successor

who was not (as Severus was) his own Prefect of the Guard? Or was he indifferent regarding the person of his successor if only the military rule as such was maintained?

Here and during the last centuries of paganism in general one must not forget that even the mightiest figures had no complete freedom of action, because they yielded to astrology and portents. There is no other way to explain, to cite one example, why Severus, who loved strict justice, should so stubbornly have retained in the prefecture of the Guard and in the closest association with his own house so frivolous a wastrel as Plautianus. Numerous superstitions encompassed the life of Severus, from his childhood to the grave. Since the imperial throne had come to be the first prize in a lottery, there were parents in all classes of society who scrupulously observed the daily life of their more gifted children for signs of future dominion. The fact was noticed if a boy recited odd verses, if turtles or eaglets or even a purple pigeon's egg was brought into the house, if snakes moved into the house or a laurel sprouted, or similar events took place. But if a child was born with a welt forming a crown on his head, or if a bit of purple cloth was inadvertently used to cover a newborn infant, then his future as an Emperor was regarded as fixed. Many an Emperor was attended by such delusions throughout his reign, and these delusions affected his acts in a manner to us incalculable. Compassion is our only reaction when the aged Severus grows restless and irascible after his last victories in Britain because a Moor bearing a cypress wreath had encountered him, or because he was taken to the wrong temple for sacrifice, or because he was given dark-colored victims to offer up, which then followed him to his quarters.

But there was no need for omens at the imperial headquarters at York; Severus' own son Caracalla desired his life, persistently and almost openly. Severus had consciously raised pitilessness to a principle, in order to suppress any thought of usurpation; but high treason on the part of the heir apparent had not entered his calculations, nor the possibility that his Guard would so brazenly support the treachery. When he whispered to his dehumanized son, "Do not let them see you

kill me!" the cry sounds like an agonized assertion of a principle of rule. Another remark he seems to have repeated several times: "I have been everything, and to no avail."

And now the repulsive monster called Caracalla ascended the imperial throne (211-217). From early youth he displayed an evil arrogance. He boasted that Alexander the Great was his model, and he praised Tiberius and Sulla. Later, perhaps after the murder of his brother Geta, came that authentic imperial madness, which employed the resources and the power of the entire Empire for its own sure destruction. His sole measure for security, which he regarded as adequate, was his camaraderie with the soldiery, whose exertions at least on occasion he shared. His similar easy familiarity with prize fighters and racing jockeys endeared him to the Roman mob. There was no need to please the respectable and the educated. After his fratricide, which the soldiers at first regarded with disapproval, Caracalla devoted himself entirely to such flattery of the mob. His requirements for his soldiers necessitated vast confiscations, and he put twenty thousand persons to death as adherents of Geta, among them a son of Pertinax; one of the more humane aspects of usurpations at Rome was that the relatives of fallen Emperors were generally spared. For his soldiers' sake also Caracalla embarked on a campaign in his own perfectly peaceful realm; the attacks of neighboring peoples he met with payments of money. The mass murders in Alexandria illustrate the attitude which despotism thought proper to meet the sophisticated mockery of the Alexandrians. The real penalty for such misdeeds (aside from the qualms of conscience of which our authors speak) was the tyrant's growing distrust of the privileged soldiery itself; at the end he came to rely entirely, as regards his immediate surroundings, upon a quite barbaric bodyguard composed of Celts and Sarmatians who could have no opinion on Roman matters, and he wore their own costume in order to retain their favor. To embassies from such peoples he used to say that if he should be murdered it would be well for them to invade Italy, for Rome would be easy to take. And yet he was struck down, in the very midst of these Guards, upon the instigation of men who

were constrained to dispose of him in order that they might not themselves fall at his hands.

The nomination of his successors fell perforce into the hands of the all-powerful army. The army first named Macrinus, one of the two Prefects of the Guard, without being aware that Macrinus had contrived the death of their beloved Caracalla. Macrinus assumed Caracalla's name and gave him a splendid funeral in order to distract suspicion from himself. With dissembled impudence he greeted the Senate for his confirmation, and received the several titles of imperial power with seemly hesitancy. Nevertheless his first severe measure toward bridling an army which had grown unaccustomed to restraint hastened his destruction. Two young Syrians, collateral relations of the Antonines and Severus, suddenly rose to be heads of the Empire. These were the dissimilar cousins Elagabalus and Alexander Severus, together with their mothers Soaemias and Mammaea and their common grandmother Julia Maesa.

With all its loathsomeness and madness the reign of Elagabalus (218-222) is not without interest for the history of Roman rule. The incredible voluptuousness, the Asiatic pomp of idolatry, the thoughtless surrender to the pleasures of the moment, constituted in fact a reaction against the regime of Septimius Severus, which was by intention a soldier's regime. Elagabalus' war upon all Roman usages, his induction of his mother and grandmother into the Senate, his appointment of dancers, professional athletes, and barbers to high positions in the state, and his sale of public offices — these need not have caused his overthrow. Even his negligence in provisioning the capital might long have been condoned. His destruction arose from an awakened sense of shame in the soldiers, which was abetted by a conspiracy in favor of Alexander among the Emperor's own kindred. The soldiers knew that Alexander's life was in peril, and forced the trembling Emperor to purge his court. Elagabalus took his revenge by expelling the Senate from the city, a measure much to the credit of the Senate, as it proves that that body was not composed wholly of "slaves dressed in togas," as Elagabalus had thought. Finally the

Guards murdered Elagabalus and raised Alexander Severus to the throne.

Of the many Emperors, none so evokes the sympathy of posterity as this man, a true St. Louis of antiquity, a man quite incomprehensible when considered in relation to his environment. His fall was the result of his efforts to turn from the debased abuses of military despotism into a path of justice and moderation. This need not imply any diminution of the reputation of his excellent mother, Mammaea; but his merit is still the greater, because, the course once set, he persevered in it with independent spirit and, motivated purely by virtue, was able to resist the many temptations of despotism. Above all we find a high regard for the Senate, such as had not been known since the time of Marcus Aurelius, and even the equestrian order, long fallen into oblivion politically, was spoken of as "nursery of the Senate." A commission of senators and an inner council of sixteen participated in government, and no effort was spared to train good and conscientious men for administration and to exercise diligent supervision. Unjust or venal officials alone could disrupt Alexander's even temper. With regard to the soldiers, he made no secret of the fact that the fate of the state rested upon them; he equipped them magnificently and treated them well. Yet just as he could boast that he reduced taxes, so he ventured to dismiss a mutinous legion. But things are reported of Alexander which are hard to reconcile with the brighter aspects of the picture. In the army we sense a continuous ferment. The Prefects of the Guard were changed under the most violent circumstances, and when Ulpian, the most eminent of their number, was murdered in the course of serious disturbances, the Emperor could only let the crime go unpunished. On this occasion we learn that the populace and the Guards engaged in bloody battle for three days in the streets of Rome and that the Guard reduced the citizenry to peace only by setting fire to their houses. The most absurd characters ventured to rise as usurpers against their excellent prince. One of them, Ovinius by name, he is said actually to have accepted as co-regent with ironic leni-

ency; but Ovinius was wearied of his throne by being made to share in the hardships of a campaign. Another, whom the soldiers raised, simply decamped. A third, the slave Uranius, the Emperor seems to have been constrained to punish. Furthermore, since Alexander was fated, as his model Marcus Aurelius had been, to suffer special visitations of misfortune, a new and warlike Persian kingdom, that of the Sassanids, arose on the Eastern borders. Alexander's war against them met with only equivocal success. On the Rhine border there were threatening movements among the Germans. The temper of the youthful ruler is said to have grown melancholy; it is reported that he showed a tendency to miserliness, but this need only mean that some of his entourage could no longer control their greed for the war chest. On the campaign at the Rhine, not far from Mainz, the soldiers murdered him and his mother. It is futile to examine the motives of this deed as they are alleged. If the successor of a Severus, a Caracalla, and an Elagabalus wished to dismiss all brutal officials, to show austerity to the soldiers, and yet to practice leniency at dangerous junctures, he was predestined to a violent end. Conspiracy was a disease of the age; it was in the very air. Alexander strove in vain for respect in a century which recognized only fear.

Maximinus, who is conjectured to have been Alexander's murderer, mounted the throne (235-238). He was a Thracian shepherd, son of a Goth and an Alan woman, hence a thorough barbarian by descent and, moreover, by education. But the army was indifferent to such considerations; it consisted of utter barbarians from the Eastern marches to whom it was of no consequence whether or not their candidate was descended from the Antonines, had been trained in high office, or had served as Senator. Instead, Maximinus was over eight feet tall and of gigantic strength, a subaltern perhaps without peer in the entire Roman army.

In principle if not in actuality his rule was more frightful than that of any Emperor. The ancient world with its monuments filled with beauty and its life filled with culture incited a venomous rage in this barbarian, who was ashamed of his

origin. Indeed, a gentle soul could not have maintained the usurpation. He required confiscations for the sake of his soldiers, and so a Roman Emperor proceeds to the systematic destruction of the very essence of Rome. He himself refused to be seen in the hated capital; at first he intended to have his son reside there, but ended by keeping him in his encampments on the Rhine and the Danube, whence he ruled the Empire. Terror-stricken Rome was apprehensive that a border army of barbarians might become the headquarters of world empire, an army that was thought of somewhat like that of Spartacus or of Athenion in the slave war. Maximinus' rage was directed against everything that was distinguished or rich or cultivated, and especially against the Senate, which he believed despised him. He caused large pictures of his German victories to be set up before the Senate House. But even the populace of the capital, which might have remained tranquil even if the entire Senate were executed, was embittered to the extreme by the reduction of supplies and the confiscation of funds for public spectacles. The provincial cities fared no better; their municipal resources, like those of their wealthy citizens, were pillaged to enrich the army. So bare and unadulterated a military rule has never reappeared in the West.

There followed a time of indescribable confusion. Of greatest interest is the vigorous and determined attitude of the much misunderstood Senate. Despair drove peasants and soldiers in Africa to revolt, and two respectable Romans, the Gordians, father and son, were forcibly put at the head of the insurrection. Upon report of this insurrection, the Senate declared against Maximinus. It was to be expected that unworthy members of that body would betray the secret resolution to the tyrant. Equally bold were the written invitations to defection which the Senate sent to the provinces. The possibility that others besides the Gordians would be proclaimed Emperor in other provinces and by other armies had to be reckoned with. Danger became critical when a commander in Africa named Capelianus (who secretly desired the Empire for himself) defeated the younger Gordian in the name of Maximinus; Gordian perished and his father hanged himself. Now the Senate named

a commission of twenty members who had experience of war, and of its own right proclaimed two Emperors, Pupienus and Balbinus (238). The situation was tense, pregnant with danger and terror. The people, which first had assisted in the proclamation of the Emperors, now again took sides with the Guards, who, irate at the independent choice of the Senate, demanded and forced the choice of a third Emperor or Crown Prince, the youngest Gordian to wit, a near relative of the first two. Our sources are confused and fragmentary; a battle to the death, for example, between Guards, gladiators, and recruits in Rome itself is dismissed with a word. It is hence impossible to pronounce a definitive judgment concerning this crisis; nevertheless, the Senate seems to have displayed singular resolution and fortitude, for it was able to uphold its two Emperors by the side of the Guards' protégé, and at the same time it bore the entire burden of defense against the oncoming Maximinus, and its commissioners directed warlike preparations throughout the provinces. At least they were assisted by the bitterness of the provincials against the cruel tyrant, so that he found Carinthia bare of people and provisions and his march through deserted Haemonia (Ljubljana) was accompanied by hundreds of wolves. This experience had disheartened his Mauretanians and Celts when he arrived before Aquileia. And when that city, under the leadership of two senators, offered a long and desperate defense, his starving army struck him down in order to make its peace with the new Emperors.

Whether it was prudent to lead all or most of these troops to Rome we can no longer decide; they would have constituted a peril even in the provinces. But in Rome serious friction was to be expected, because of *esprit de corps*, between the predominantly Germanic army of the Senate's Emperors and Maximinus' troops. In any case the latter, as is the way of vanquished armies and defeated parties, sought an outlet for its ill humor. The victims were the two senatorial Emperors, and after they were dispatched soldiers and populace alike in wild tumult hailed the youthful Gordian (238-244) as Augustus. The Senate was overpowered but apparently by no means crushed; soldiers who forced their way into its session

(held, at that time, on the Capitoline) were cut down by senators at the altar of Victory.

The next reign was a regime of eunuchs and cabals which surrounded the inexperienced youth. After a time a great and earnest man, the orator Misiheus, found his way to him and aroused his nobler nature. He became, we know not how, guardian, regent, even father-in-law to Gordian, and Gordian bestowed upon him both prefectures, that of the Guards and that of the capital. Misiheus' position, even the title "Father of the Prince" which the Senate bestowed upon him, recalls the Atabegs of the Seljuk Sultans in the twelfth century. Whether he established an understanding with the Senate cannot be determined; in any case this excellent reign did not long endure. On a campaign against the Persians which was otherwise successful the guardian succumbed to the poison of Philip called the Arab. Then Philip rendered the soldiers unruly by a contrived famine, thrust himself into the position of co-regent to the helpless Gordian through suborned officers, and gradually deprived Gordian of all authority and finally of his life.

Upon the report of Gordian's death the Senate intervened quickly, but the philosopher Marcus whom it named Emperor soon died, as did also a certain Severus Hostilianus who somehow next got possession of the throne. Philip, who had meanwhile arrived in Rome and had won over the most important of the senators by supple talk, was now acknowledged Emperor (244-249). To call Philip an Arab sheik is to do him too much honor; he derived from the disreputable tribe of southern Syrians east of the Jordan.

If the attraction of imperial power were not so utterly blinding it would be hard to conceive how this man could expect, with his negligible military capacity, to master the Roman Empire, which he had obtained by fraud, by distributing its principal offices to relatives and friends. While he was celebrating the Secular Games, which marked the city's thousandth anniversary, in Rome, barbarians were crashing into the Empire from several directions, and at least two armies were setting up new Emperors. In Syria there arose against Philip's brother Priscus the adventurer Jotapian, who claimed descent

from Alexander the Great, a name which still received almost superstitious reverence. In Moesia Marinus arose against Philip's son-in-law Severian, while near by the Goths were marching into the Empire.

The Empire's great and obvious peril once more aroused the genius of Rome. The second half of the third century is an era which would surely gain in esteem if we had fuller knowledge of its personalities and the motivation of their measures than our sources afford. Although the leading figures are not for the most part Roman in the strict sense, but rather Illyrian, that is to say, from the regions between the Adriatic and the Black Seas, nevertheless it was Roman culture and tradition, specifically in matters of war, that enabled them to become the new saviors of the ancient world. To be a Roman Emperor was no longer a pleasure but a fateful obligation. Men unworthy of it assumed the purple only under constraint; better men no longer pressed forward to the office but recognized in it duty or destiny. There is an unmistakable atmosphere of moral exaltation.

The great dangers soon put an end to Philip's reign. He turned to the Senate in terror and offered his abdication. There was silence, until the gallant Decius offered his services to subdue Marinus. He was successful, but asked to be recalled, for he saw that because of the general contempt for Philip the army would wish to make him Emperor. Philip refused his request, and the inevitable came to pass. In or after a battle against Decius, Philip was put to death by soldiers at Verona. The fact that Philip's brother Priscus could subsequently be governor of Macedonia proves that Decius need have no shame for what had transpired. In the sequel Priscus repaid him with treason.

Decius (249-251) was primarily an idealist, with the idealist's illusions. To employ his very great military capacity in the service of a refined senatorial regime, to restore ancient Roman virtue and religion and hence the power of the Roman name, and to establish it forever — these were doubtless his designs. It was in keeping with this design that he persecuted the Christians; sixty years later he might have employed simi-