military quæstor of Sardinia. His next office, probably in 174, was that of legate to the proconsul of Africa, and in the following year he was tribune of the plebs. This magistracy, though far different from what it had been in the days of the republic, was still one of dignity, and brought with it promotion to a higher grade in the senate. During the tribunate he married his first wife Marcia, whose name he passed over in his autobiography, though he erected statues of her after he became emperor. In 178 Severus became prætor, not by favour of the emperor, but by competition for the suffrages of the senators. Then, probably in the same year, he went to Spain as legate; after that (179) he commanded a legion in Syria. The death of Marcus Aurelius seems in some way to have interrupted his career ; he was unemployed for several years, and devoted great part of his leisure to the study of literature, religion, and antiquities (so says Spartianus) at Athens. The year of Severus’s first consulship cannot be determined with precision, but it falls within the space between 185 and 190. In this time also falls the marriage with Julia, afterwards famous as Julia Domna, whose acquaintance he had no doubt made when an officer in Syria. Her two sons Bassianus (known as Caracalla) and Geta were probably born in 188 and 189. Severus was governor in succession of Gallia Lugdunensis, Sicily, and Pannonia Superior. He was in command of three legions at Carnuntum, the capital of the province last named, when news reached him that Commodus had been murdered by his favourite concubine and his most trusted servants.

Up to this moment the career of Severus had been ordinary in its character. He had not raised himself above the usual official level. He had achieved no military dis­tinction,—had indeed seen no warfare beyond the petty border frays of a frontier province. But the storm that now tried all official spirits found his alone powerful enough to brave it. Three imperial dynasties had now been ended by assassination. The Flavian line had enjoyed much shorter duration and much less prestige than the other two, and the circumstances of its fall had been peculiar in that it was probably planned in the interest of the senate and the senate certainly reaped the immediate fruits. But the crisis which arose on the death of Nero and the crisis which arose on the death of Commodus were strikingly alike. In both cases it was left to the army to determine by a struggle which of the divisional commanders should succeed to the command-in-chief, that is, to the imperial throne. In each case the contest began with an impulsion given to the com­manders by the legionaries themselves. The soldiers of the great commands competed keenly for the honour and the material advantages to be won by placing their general in the seat of empire. The officer who refused to lead would have been deemed a traitor to his troops, and would have suffered the punishment of his treason.

There is a widespread impression that the Praetorian guards at all times held the Roman empire in their hands, but its erroneousness is demonstrated by the events of the year 193. For the first time in the course of imperial history the Praetorians presumed to nominate as emperor a man who had no legions at his back. This was Pertinax, who has been well styled the Galba of his time—upright and honourable to severity, and zealous for good govern­ment, but blindly optimist about the possibilities of reform in a feeble and corrupt age. After a three months’ rule he was destroyed by the power that lifted him up. According to the well-known story, true rather in its out­line than in its details, the Prætorians sold the throne to Didius Julianus. But at the end of two months both the Prætorians and their nominee were swept away by the real disposers of Roman rule, the provincial legions. Four groups of legions at the time were strong enough to aspire

to determine the destiny of the empire,—those quartered in Britain, in Germany, in Pannonia, in Syria. Three of the groups actually took the decisive step, and Severus in Pannonia, Pescennius Niger in Syria, Clodius Albinus in Britain, received from their troops the title of Augustus. Severus far outdid his rivals in promptness and decision. By what means we do not know, he secured the aid of the legions in Germany and of those in Illyria. These, with the forces in Pannonia, made a combination suffi­ciently formidable to overawe Albinus for the moment. He probably deemed that his best chance lay in the exhaustion of his competitors by an internecine struggle. At all events he received with submission an offer made by Severus, no doubt well understood by both to be politic, insincere, and temporary. Severus sent a trusted officer, who confirmed Albinus in his power and bestowed upon him the title of Cæsar, making him the nominal heir- apparent to the throne.

Before the action of Severus was known in Rome, the senate and people had shown signs of turning to Pescen­nius Niger, that he might deliver them from the poor puppet Didius Julianus and avenge on the Prætorians the murder of Pertinax. Having secured the co-operation or neutrality of all the forces in the western part of the empire, Severus hastened to Rome. To win the sympathy of the capital he posed as the avenger and successor of Pertinax, whose name he even added to his own, and used to the end of his reign. The feeble defences of Julianus were broken down and the Prætorians disarmed and dis­banded, without a blow being struck. A new body of household troops was enrolled and organized on quite different principles from the old. In face of the senate, as Dio tells us, Severus acted for the moment like “ one of the good emperors in the olden days.” After a magni­ficent entry into the city he joined the senate in execrat­ing the memory of Commodus, and in punishing the murderers of Pertinax, whom he honoured with the most splendid funeral rites. He also encouraged the senate to pass a decree directing that any emperor or subordinate of an emperor who should put a senator to death should be treated as a public enemy. But he ominously refrained from asking the senate to sanction his accession to the throne.

The rest of Severus’s reign, as it is read in the ancient histories, is in the main occupied with wars, over which we shall rapidly pass. The power wielded by Pescennius Niger, who called himself emperor, and was supposed to control one half of the Roman world, proved to be more imposing than substantial. The magnificent promises of Oriental princes were falsified as usual in the hour of need. Niger himself, as described by Dio, was the very type of mediocrity, conspicuous for no faculties, good or bad. This very character had no doubt commended him to Commodus as suited for the important command in Syria, which might have proved a source of danger in abler hands. The contest between Severus and Niger was practically decided after two or three engagements, fought by Severus’s officers. The last battle, which took place at Issus, ended in the defeat and death of Niger (194). After this the emperor spent two years in successful attacks upon the peoples bordering on Syria, particularly in Adiabene and Osrhoene. Byzantium, the first of Niger’s possessions to be attacked, was the last to fall, after a glorious defence.

Late in 196 Severus turned westward, to reckon with Albinus, who was well aware that the reckoning was inevitable. He was better born and better educated than Severus, but in capacity far inferior. As Severus was nearing Italy he received the news that Albinus had been declared emperor by his soldiers. The first counter-stroke