

Royal Divinities

THERE is a curious dissertation in the “Mémoires de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres,” by the Abbé Mongault, “on the divine honours which were paid to the governors of provinces during the Roman republic;” in their lifetime these originally began in gratitude, and at length degenerated into flattery. These facts curiously show how far the human mind can advance, when led on by customs that operate invisibly on it, and blind us in our absurdities. One of these ceremonies was exquisitely ridiculous. When they voted a statue to a proconsul, they placed it among the statues of the gods in the festival called *Lectisternium*, from the ridiculous circumstances of this solemn festival. On that day the gods were invited to a repast, which was, however, spread in various quarters of the city, to satiate mouths more mortal. The gods were however taken down from their pedestals, laid on beds ornamented in their temples; pillows were placed under their marble heads; and while they reposed in this easy posture they were served with a magnificent repast. When Cæsar had conquered Rome, the servile senate put him to dine with the gods! Fatigued by, and ashamed of these honours, he desired the senate to erase from his statue in the capitol the title they had given him of a *demigod!*

ISAAC D’ISRAELI

We know that the first Roman emperors did not want flatterers, and that the adulations they sometimes lavished were extravagant. But perhaps few know that they were less offensive than the flatterers of the third century under the Pagan, and of the fourth under the Christian emperors. Those who are acquainted with the character of the age of Augustulus have only to look at the one, and the other *code*, to find an infinite number of passages which had not been bearable even in that age. For instance, here is a law of Arcadius and Honorius, published in 404:

“Let the officers of the palace be warned to abstain from frequenting tumultuous meetings; and that those who, instigated by a *sacrilegious* temerity, dare to oppose the authority of our *divinity*, shall be deprived of their employments, and their estates confiscated.” The letters they write are *holy*. When the sons speak of their fathers, it is “Their father of *divine* memory;” or “Their *divine* father.” They call their own laws *oracles*, and *celestial* oracles. So also their subjects address them by the titles of “*Your Perpetuity, your Eternity.*” And it appears by a law of Theodore the Great that the emperors at length added this to their titles. It begins, “If any magistrate, after having concluded a public work, put

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his name rather than that of *our Perpetuity*, let him be judged guilty of high treason.” All this reminds one of “the celestial empire” of the Chinese.

Whenever the Great Mogul made an observation, Bernier tells us that some of the first Omrahs lifted up their hands, crying, “Wonder! wonder! wonder!” And a proverb current in his dominion was, “If the king saith at noonday it is night, you are to say, Behold the moon and the stars!” Such adulation, however, could not alter the general condition and fortune of this unhappy being, who became a sovereign without knowing what it is to be one. He was brought out of the seraglio to be placed on the throne, and it was he, rather than the spectators, who might have truly used the interjection of astonishment!