

Being masters of the universe, they arrogated to themselves all the treasures of it; and were less unjust robbers, considered as conquerors, than considered as legislators. Hearing that Ptolemy king of Cyprus was possessed of immense wealth, they (a) enacted a law, proposed by a tribune, by which they gave to themselves the inheritance of a man still living, and confiscated to their own use the estates of a confederate prince.

In a little time the greediness of particular persons quite devoured whatever had escaped the public avarice; magistrates and governors used to sell their injustice to kings: two competitors would ruin one another, for the sake of purchasing an ever-dubious protection against a rival who was not quite undone; for the Romans had not even the justice of robbers, who preserve a certain probity in the exercise of guilt. In fine, as rights, whether lawful or usurped, were maintained by money only; princes, to obtain it, despoiled temples, and confiscated the possessions of the wealthiest citizens; a thousand crimes were committed, purely for the sake of giving to the Romans all the money in the universe.

But nothing was of greater advantage to this people than the awe with which they struck the whole earth: in an instant, kings were put to silence, and seemed as though they were stupid; no regard was had to their eminence, but their very persons were attacked; to hazard a war, was to expose themselves to captivity, to death, to the infamy of a triumph. Thus kings, who lived in the midst of pomps and

(a) *Divitiarum tanta fama erat, says Florus, ut victor gentium populus, et donare regna consuetus, socii virique regis confiscationem mandaverit. lib. iii. c. 9.*