

Book XII.
Title XXXI.

Concerning the equestrian rank.
(De equestri dignitate.)

12.31.1. Emperors Valentinian and Valens to Mamertinum, City Prefect.

We order that the Roman knights shall have the second rank after the clarissimate (dignity of honorable).

Given at Philippolis October 31 (364).

C. Th. 6. 36. 1.

Note.

The Roman knights had at one time been a powerful order, and a rival of the senate. The order was second in rank, the clarissimus, honorable, being the highest. But the former fell into decay after Constantine. Smith's Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquity, under the title of Equites, says: "After the time of Diocletian, the equites became only a city guard, under the command of the prefectus vigilum (prefect of the watch)." The power of the order is recognized by all historians. See e.g. Mattingly, The Imperial Civil Service of Rome. In the latter part of the fourth century, the orders of worshipful and illustrious came into existence, and that doomed the importance of the knights, as well as of the title "perfectissimus" mentioned in the next title. It is still, however, mentioned in the Basilica, in Book 6.34.1 and 2.