

Chapter XXVI: Progress of The Huns.--Part IV.

One of the most dangerous inconveniences of the introduction of the Barbarians into the army and the palace, was sensibly felt in their correspondence with their hostile countrymen; to whom they imprudently, or maliciously, revealed the weakness of the Roman empire. A soldier, of the lifeguards of Gratian, was of the nation of the Alemanni, and of the tribe of the Lentienses, who dwelt beyond the Lake of Constance. Some domestic business obliged him to request a leave of absence. In a short visit to his family and friends, he was exposed to their curious inquiries: and the vanity of the loquacious soldier tempted him to display his intimate acquaintance with the secrets of the state, and the designs of his master. The intelligence, that Gratian was preparing to lead the military force of Gaul, and of the West, to the assistance of his uncle Valens, pointed out to the restless spirit of the Alemanni the moment, and the mode, of a successful invasion. The enterprise of some light detachments, who, in the month of February, passed the Rhine upon the ice, was the prelude of a more important war. The boldest hopes of rapine, perhaps of conquest, outweighed the considerations of timid prudence, or national faith. Every forest, and every village, poured forth a band of hardy adventurers; and the great army of the Alemanni, which, on their approach, was estimated at forty thousand men by the fears of the people, was afterwards magnified to the number of seventy thousand by the vain and credulous flattery of the Imperial court. The legions, which had been ordered to march into Pannonia, were immediately recalled, or detained, for the defence of Gaul; the military command

was divided between Nanienus and Mellobaudes; and the youthful emperor, though he respected the long experience and sober wisdom of the former, was much more inclined to admire, and to follow, the martial ardor of his colleague; who was allowed to unite the incompatible characters of count of the domestics, and of king of the Franks. His rival Priarius, king of the Alemanni, was guided, or rather impelled, by the same headstrong valor; and as their troops were animated by the spirit of their leaders, they met, they saw, they encountered each other, near the town of Argentaria, or Colmar, [86] in the plains of Alsace. The glory of the day was justly ascribed to the missile weapons, and well-practised evolutions, of the Roman soldiers; the Alemanni, who long maintained their ground, were slaughtered with unrelenting fury; five thousand only of the Barbarians escaped to the woods and mountains; and the glorious death of their king on the field of battle saved him from the reproaches of the people, who are always disposed to accuse the justice, or policy, of an unsuccessful war. After this signal victory, which secured the peace of Gaul, and asserted the honor of the Roman arms, the emperor Gratian appeared to proceed without delay on his Eastern expedition; but as he approached the confines of the Alemanni, he suddenly inclined to the left, surprised them by his unexpected passage of the Rhine, and boldly advanced into the heart of their country. The Barbarians opposed to his progress the obstacles of nature and of courage; and still continued to retreat, from one hill to another, till they were satisfied, by repeated trials, of the power and perseverance of their enemies. Their submission was accepted as a proof, not indeed of their sincere repentance, but of their actual distress;

and a select number of their brave and robust youth was exacted from the faithless nation, as the most substantial pledge of their future moderation. The subjects of the empire, who had so often experienced that the Alemanni could neither be subdued by arms, nor restrained by treaties, might not promise themselves any solid or lasting tranquillity: but they discovered, in the virtues of their young sovereign, the prospect of a long and auspicious reign. When the legions climbed the mountains, and scaled the fortifications of the Barbarians, the valor of Gratian was distinguished in the foremost ranks; and the gilt and variegated armor of his guards was pierced and shattered by the blows which they had received in their constant attachment to the person of their sovereign. At the age of nineteen, the son of Valentinian seemed to possess the talents of peace and war; and his personal success against the Alemanni was interpreted as a sure presage of his Gothic triumphs. [87]

[Footnote 86: The field of battle, Argentaria or Argentovaria, is accurately fixed by M. D'Anville (*Notice de l'Ancienne Gaule*, p. 96--99) at twenty-three Gallic leagues, or thirty-four and a half Roman miles to the south of Strasburg. From its ruins the adjacent town of Colmar has arisen. Note: It is rather Horburg, on the right bank of the River Ill, opposite to Colmar. From Schoepflin, *Alsacia Illustrata*. St. Martin, iv. 121.--M.]

[Footnote 87: The full and impartial narrative of Ammianus (xxxix. 10) may derive some additional light from the *Epitome of Victor*, the

Chronicle of Jerom, and the History of Orosius, (l. vii. c. 33, p. 552, edit. Havercamp.)]

While Gratian deserved and enjoyed the applause of his subjects, the emperor Valens, who, at length, had removed his court and army from Antioch, was received by the people of Constantinople as the author of the public calamity. Before he had reposed himself ten days in the capital, he was urged by the licentious clamors of the Hippodrome to march against the Barbarians, whom he had invited into his dominions; and the citizens, who are always brave at a distance from any real danger, declared, with confidence, that, if they were supplied with arms, they alone would undertake to deliver the province from the ravages of an insulting foe. [88] The vain reproaches of an ignorant multitude hastened the downfall of the Roman empire; they provoked the desperate rashness of Valens; who did not find, either in his reputation or in his mind, any motives to support with firmness the public contempt. He was soon persuaded, by the successful achievements of his lieutenants, to despise the power of the Goths, who, by the diligence of Fritigern, were now collected in the neighborhood of Hadrianople. The march of the Taifalae had been intercepted by the valiant Frigeric: the king of those licentious Barbarians was slain in battle; and the suppliant captives were sent into distant exile to cultivate the lands of Italy, which were assigned for their settlement in the vacant territories of Modena and Parma. [89] The exploits of Sebastian, [90] who was recently engaged in the service of Valens, and promoted to the rank of master-general of the infantry, were still more honorable to

himself, and useful to the republic. He obtained the permission of selecting three hundred soldiers from each of the legions; and this separate detachment soon acquired the spirit of discipline, and the exercise of arms, which were almost forgotten under the reign of Valens. By the vigor and conduct of Sebastian, a large body of the Goths were surprised in their camp; and the immense spoil, which was recovered from their hands, filled the city of Hadrianople, and the adjacent plain. The splendid narratives, which the general transmitted of his own exploits, alarmed the Imperial court by the appearance of superior merit; and though he cautiously insisted on the difficulties of the Gothic war, his valor was praised, his advice was rejected; and Valens, who listened with pride and pleasure to the flattering suggestions of the eunuchs of the palace, was impatient to seize the glory of an easy and assured conquest. His army was strengthened by a numerous reenforcement of veterans; and his march from Constantinople to Hadrianople was conducted with so much military skill, that he prevented the activity of the Barbarians, who designed to occupy the intermediate defiles, and to intercept either the troops themselves, or their convoys of provisions. The camp of Valens, which he pitched under the walls of Hadrianople, was fortified, according to the practice of the Romans, with a ditch and rampart; and a most important council was summoned, to decide the fate of the emperor and of the empire. The party of reason and of delay was strenuously maintained by Victor, who had corrected, by the lessons of experience, the native fierceness of the Sarmatian character; while Sebastian, with the flexible and obsequious eloquence of a courtier, represented every precaution, and every measure, that implied a doubt

of immediate victory, as unworthy of the courage and majesty of their invincible monarch. The ruin of Valens was precipitated by the deceitful arts of Fritigern, and the prudent admonitions of the emperor of the West. The advantages of negotiating in the midst of war were perfectly understood by the general of the Barbarians; and a Christian ecclesiastic was despatched, as the holy minister of peace, to penetrate, and to perplex, the councils of the enemy. The misfortunes, as well as the provocations, of the Gothic nation, were forcibly and truly described by their ambassador; who protested, in the name of Fritigern, that he was still disposed to lay down his arms, or to employ them only in the defence of the empire; if he could secure for his wandering countrymen a tranquil settlement on the waste lands of Thrace, and a sufficient allowance of corn and cattle. But he added, in a whisper of confidential friendship, that the exasperated Barbarians were averse to these reasonable conditions; and that Fritigern was doubtful whether he could accomplish the conclusion of the treaty, unless he found himself supported by the presence and terrors of an Imperial army. About the same time, Count Richomer returned from the West to announce the defeat and submission of the Alemanni, to inform Valens that his nephew advanced by rapid marches at the head of the veteran and victorious legions of Gaul, and to request, in the name of Gratian and of the republic, that every dangerous and decisive measure might be suspended, till the junction of the two emperors should insure the success of the Gothic war. But the feeble sovereign of the East was actuated only by the fatal illusions of pride and jealousy. He disdained the importunate advice; he rejected the humiliating aid; he secretly

compared the ignominious, at least the inglorious, period of his own reign, with the fame of a beardless youth; and Valens rushed into the field, to erect his imaginary trophy, before the diligence of his colleague could usurp any share of the triumphs of the day.

[Footnote 88: *Moratus paucissimos dies, seditione popularium levium pulsus* Ammian. xxxi. 11. Socrates (l. iv. c. 38) supplies the dates and some circumstances. * Note: Compare fragment of Eunapius. Mai, 272, in Niebuhr, p. 77.--M]

[Footnote 89: *Vivosque omnes circa Mutinam, Regiumque, et Parmam, Italica oppida, rura culturos exterminavit.* Ammianus, xxxi. 9. Those cities and districts, about ten years after the colony of the Taifalae, appear in a very desolate state. See Muratori, *Dissertazioni sopra le Antichita Italiane*, tom. i. Dissertat. xxi. p. 354.]

[Footnote 90: Ammian. xxxi. 11. Zosimus, l. iv. p. 228--230. The latter expatiates on the desultory exploits of Sebastian, and despatches, in a few lines, the important battle of Hadrianople. According to the ecclesiastical critics, who hate Sebastian, the praise of Zosimus is disgrace, (Tillemont, *Hist. des Empereurs*, tom. v. p. 121.) His prejudice and ignorance undoubtedly render him a very questionable judge of merit.]

On the ninth of August, a day which has deserved to be marked among the most inauspicious of the Roman Calendar, [91] the emperor Valens,

leaving, under a strong guard, his baggage and military treasure, marched from Hadrianople to attack the Goths, who were encamped about twelve miles from the city. [92] By some mistake of the orders, or some ignorance of the ground, the right wing, or column of cavalry arrived in sight of the enemy, whilst the left was still at a considerable distance; the soldiers were compelled, in the sultry heat of summer, to precipitate their pace; and the line of battle was formed with tedious confusion and irregular delay. The Gothic cavalry had been detached to forage in the adjacent country; and Fritigern still continued to practise his customary arts. He despatched messengers of peace, made proposals, required hostages, and wasted the hours, till the Romans, exposed without shelter to the burning rays of the sun, were exhausted by thirst, hunger, and intolerable fatigue. The emperor was persuaded to send an ambassador to the Gothic camp; the zeal of Richomer, who alone had courage to accept the dangerous commission, was applauded; and the count of the domestics, adorned with the splendid ensigns of his dignity, had proceeded some way in the space between the two armies, when he was suddenly recalled by the alarm of battle. The hasty and imprudent attack was made by Bacurius the Iberian, who commanded a body of archers and targeteers; and as they advanced with rashness, they retreated with loss and disgrace. In the same moment, the flying squadrons of Alatheus and Saphrax, whose return was anxiously expected by the general of the Goths, descended like a whirlwind from the hills, swept across the plain, and added new terrors to the tumultuous, but irresistible charge of the Barbarian host. The event of the battle of Hadrianople, so fatal to Valens and to the empire, may be described in

a few words: the Roman cavalry fled; the infantry was abandoned, surrounded, and cut in pieces. The most skilful evolutions, the firmest courage, are scarcely sufficient to extricate a body of foot, encompassed, on an open plain, by superior numbers of horse; but the troops of Valens, oppressed by the weight of the enemy and their own fears, were crowded into a narrow space, where it was impossible for them to extend their ranks, or even to use, with effect, their swords and javelins. In the midst of tumult, of slaughter, and of dismay, the emperor, deserted by his guards and wounded, as it was supposed, with an arrow, sought protection among the Lancearii and the Mattiarii, who still maintained their ground with some appearance of order and firmness. His faithful generals, Trajan and Victor, who perceived his danger, loudly exclaimed that all was lost, unless the person of the emperor could be saved. Some troops, animated by their exhortation, advanced to his relief: they found only a bloody spot, covered with a heap of broken arms and mangled bodies, without being able to discover their unfortunate prince, either among the living or the dead. Their search could not indeed be successful, if there is any truth in the circumstances with which some historians have related the death of the emperor.

By the care of his attendants, Valens was removed from the field of battle to a neighboring cottage, where they attempted to dress his wound, and to provide for his future safety. But this humble retreat was instantly surrounded by the enemy: they tried to force the door, they were provoked by a discharge of arrows from the roof, till at length,

impatient of delay, they set fire to a pile of dry magots, and consumed the cottage with the Roman emperor and his train. Valens perished in the flames; and a youth, who dropped from the window, alone escaped, to attest the melancholy tale, and to inform the Goths of the inestimable prize which they had lost by their own rashness. A great number of brave and distinguished officers perished in the battle of Hadrianople, which equalled in the actual loss, and far surpassed in the fatal consequences, the misfortune which Rome had formerly sustained in the fields of Cannae. [93] Two master-generals of the cavalry and infantry, two great officers of the palace, and thirty-five tribunes, were found among the slain; and the death of Sebastian might satisfy the world, that he was the victim, as well as the author, of the public calamity. Above two thirds of the Roman army were destroyed: and the darkness of the night was esteemed a very favorable circumstance, as it served to conceal the flight of the multitude, and to protect the more orderly retreat of Victor and Richomer, who alone, amidst the general consternation, maintained the advantage of calm courage and regular discipline. [94]

[Footnote 91: Ammianus (xxxi. 12, 13) almost alone describes the councils and actions which were terminated by the fatal battle of Hadrianople. We might censure the vices of his style, the disorder and perplexity of his narrative: but we must now take leave of this impartial historian; and reproach is silenced by our regret for such an irreparable loss.]

[Footnote 92: The difference of the eight miles of Ammianus, and the twelve of Idatius, can only embarrass those critics (Valesius ad loc.,) who suppose a great army to be a mathematical point, without space or dimensions.]

[Footnote 93: Nec ulla annalibus, praeter Cannensem pugnam, ita ad interneccionem res legitur gesta. Ammian. xxxi. 13. According to the grave Polybius, no more than 370 horse, and 3,000 foot, escaped from the field of Cannae: 10,000 were made prisoners; and the number of the slain amounted to 5,630 horse, and 70,000 foot, (Polyb. l. iii. p 371, edit. Casaubon, 8vo.) Livy (xxii. 49) is somewhat less bloody: he slaughters only 2,700 horse, and 40,000 foot. The Roman army was supposed to consist of 87,200 effective men, (xxii. 36.)]

[Footnote 94: We have gained some faint light from Jerom, (tom. i. p. 26 and in Chron. p. 188,) Victor, (in Epitome,) Orosius, (l. vii. c. 33, p. 554,) Jornandes, (c. 27,) Zosimus, (l. iv. p. 230,) Socrates, (l. iv. c. 38,) Sozomen, (l. vi. c. 40,) Idatius, (in Chron.) But their united evidence, if weighed against Ammianus alone, is light and unsubstantial.]

While the impressions of grief and terror were still recent in the minds of men, the most celebrated rhetorician of the age composed the funeral oration of a vanquished army, and of an unpopular prince, whose throne was already occupied by a stranger. "There are not wanting," says the candid Libanius, "those who arraign the prudence of the emperor, or who

impute the public misfortune to the want of courage and discipline in the troops. For my own part, I reverence the memory of their former exploits: I reverence the glorious death, which they bravely received, standing, and fighting in their ranks: I reverence the field of battle, stained with their blood, and the blood of the Barbarians. Those honorable marks have been already washed away by the rains; but the lofty monuments of their bones, the bones of generals, of centurions, and of valiant warriors, claim a longer period of duration. The king himself fought and fell in the foremost ranks of the battle. His attendants presented him with the fleetest horses of the Imperial stable, that would soon have carried him beyond the pursuit of the enemy. They vainly pressed him to reserve his important life for the future service of the republic. He still declared that he was unworthy to survive so many of the bravest and most faithful of his subjects; and the monarch was nobly buried under a mountain of the slain. Let none, therefore, presume to ascribe the victory of the Barbarians to the fear, the weakness, or the imprudence, of the Roman troops. The chiefs and the soldiers were animated by the virtue of their ancestors, whom they equalled in discipline and the arts of war. Their generous emulation was supported by the love of glory, which prompted them to contend at the same time with heat and thirst, with fire and the sword; and cheerfully to embrace an honorable death, as their refuge against flight and infamy. The indignation of the gods has been the only cause of the success of our enemies." The truth of history may disclaim some parts of this panegyric, which cannot strictly be reconciled with the character of Valens, or the circumstances of the battle: but the fairest

commendation is due to the eloquence, and still more to the generosity, of the sophist of Antioch. [95]

[Footnote 95: Libanius de ulciscend. Julian. nece, c. 3, in Fabricius, Bibliot Graec. tom. vii. p. 146--148.]

The pride of the Goths was elated by this memorable victory; but their avarice was disappointed by the mortifying discovery, that the richest part of the Imperial spoil had been within the walls of Hadrianople. They hastened to possess the reward of their valor; but they were encountered by the remains of a vanquished army, with an intrepid resolution, which was the effect of their despair, and the only hope of their safety. The walls of the city, and the ramparts of the adjacent camp, were lined with military engines, that threw stones of an enormous weight; and astonished the ignorant Barbarians by the noise, and velocity, still more than by the real effects, of the discharge. The soldiers, the citizens, the provincials, the domestics of the palace, were united in the danger, and in the defence: the furious assault of the Goths was repulsed; their secret arts of treachery and treason were discovered; and, after an obstinate conflict of many hours, they retired to their tents; convinced, by experience, that it would be far more advisable to observe the treaty, which their sagacious leader had tacitly stipulated with the fortifications of great and populous cities. After the hasty and impolitic massacre of three hundred deserters, an act of justice extremely useful to the discipline of the Roman armies, the Goths indignantly raised the siege of Hadrianople. The scene of war

and tumult was instantly converted into a silent solitude: the multitude suddenly disappeared; the secret paths of the woods and mountains were marked with the footsteps of the trembling fugitives, who sought a refuge in the distant cities of Illyricum and Macedonia; and the faithful officers of the household, and the treasury, cautiously proceeded in search of the emperor, of whose death they were still ignorant. The tide of the Gothic inundation rolled from the walls of Hadrianople to the suburbs of Constantinople. The Barbarians were surprised with the splendid appearance of the capital of the East, the height and extent of the walls, the myriads of wealthy and affrighted citizens who crowded the ramparts, and the various prospect of the sea and land. While they gazed with hopeless desire on the inaccessible beauties of Constantinople, a sally was made from one of the gates by a party of Saracens, [96] who had been fortunately engaged in the service of Valens. The cavalry of Scythia was forced to yield to the admirable swiftness and spirit of the Arabian horses: their riders were skilled in the evolutions of irregular war; and the Northern Barbarians were astonished and dismayed, by the inhuman ferocity of the Barbarians of the South.

A Gothic soldier was slain by the dagger of an Arab; and the hairy, naked savage, applying his lips to the wound, expressed a horrid delight, while he sucked the blood of his vanquished enemy. [97] The army of the Goths, laden with the spoils of the wealthy suburbs and the adjacent territory, slowly moved, from the Bosphorus, to the mountains which form the western boundary of Thrace. The important pass of

Succi was betrayed by the fear, or the misconduct, of Maurus; and the Barbarians, who no longer had any resistance to apprehend from the scattered and vanquished troops of the East, spread themselves over the face of a fertile and cultivated country, as far as the confines of Italy and the Hadriatic Sea. [98]

[Footnote 96: Valens had gained, or rather purchased, the friendship of the Saracens, whose vexatious inroads were felt on the borders of Phoenicia, Palestine, and Egypt. The Christian faith had been lately introduced among a people, reserved, in a future age, to propagate another religion, (Tillemont, *Hist. des Empereurs*, tom. v. p. 104, 106, 141. *Mem. Eccles.* tom. vii. p. 593.)]

[Footnote 97: Crinitus quidam, nudus omnia praeter pubem, subraunum et ugrabre strepens. *Ammian.* xxxi. 16, and *Vales. ad loc.* The Arabs often fought naked; a custom which may be ascribed to their sultry climate, and ostentatious bravery. The description of this unknown savage is the lively portrait of Derar, a name so dreadful to the Christians of Syria. See *Ockley's Hist. of the Saracens*, vol. i. p. 72, 84, 87.]

[Footnote 98: The series of events may still be traced in the last pages of *Ammianus*, (xxx. 15, 16.) *Zosimus*, (l. iv. p. 227, 231,) whom we are now reduced to cherish, misplaces the sally of the Arabs before the death of Valens. *Eunapius* (in *Excerpt. Legat.* p. 20) praises the fertility of Thrace, Macedonia, &c.]

The Romans, who so coolly, and so concisely, mention the acts of justice which were exercised by the legions, [99] reserve their compassion, and their eloquence, for their own sufferings, when the provinces were invaded, and desolated, by the arms of the successful Barbarians. The simple circumstantial narrative (did such a narrative exist) of the ruin of a single town, of the misfortunes of a single family, [100] might exhibit an interesting and instructive picture of human manners: but the tedious repetition of vague and declamatory complaints would fatigue the attention of the most patient reader. The same censure may be applied, though not perhaps in an equal degree, to the profane, and the ecclesiastical, writers of this unhappy period; that their minds were inflamed by popular and religious animosity; and that the true size and color of every object is falsified by the exaggerations of their corrupt eloquence. The vehement Jerom [101] might justly deplore the calamities inflicted by the Goths, and their barbarous allies, on his native country of Pannonia, and the wide extent of the provinces, from the walls of Constantinople to the foot of the Julian Alps; the rapes, the massacres, the conflagrations; and, above all, the profanation of the churches, that were turned into stables, and the contemptuous treatment of the relics of holy martyrs. But the Saint is surely transported beyond the limits of nature and history, when he affirms, "that, in those desert countries, nothing was left except the sky and the earth; that, after the destruction of the cities, and the extirpation of the human race, the land was overgrown with thick forests and inextricable brambles; and that the universal desolation, announced by the prophet Zephaniah, was accomplished, in the scarcity of the beasts, the birds,

and even of the fish." These complaints were pronounced about twenty years after the death of Valens; and the Illyrian provinces, which were constantly exposed to the invasion and passage of the Barbarians, still continued, after a calamitous period of ten centuries, to supply new materials for rapine and destruction. Could it even be supposed, that a large tract of country had been left without cultivation and without inhabitants, the consequences might not have been so fatal to the inferior productions of animated nature. The useful and feeble animals, which are nourished by the hand of man, might suffer and perish, if they were deprived of his protection; but the beasts of the forest, his enemies or his victims, would multiply in the free and undisturbed possession of their solitary domain. The various tribes that people the air, or the waters, are still less connected with the fate of the human species; and it is highly probable that the fish of the Danube would have felt more terror and distress, from the approach of a voracious pike, than from the hostile inroad of a Gothic army.

[Footnote 99: Observe with how much indifference Caesar relates, in the Commentaries of the Gallic war, that he put to death the whole senate of the Veneti, who had yielded to his mercy, (iii. 16;) that he labored to extirpate the whole nation of the Eburones, (vi. 31;) that forty thousand persons were massacred at Bourges by the just revenge of his soldiers, who spared neither age nor sex, (vii. 27,) &c.]

[Footnote 100: Such are the accounts of the sack of Magdeburgh, by the ecclesiastic and the fisherman, which Mr. Harte has transcribed, (Hist.

of Gustavus Adolphus, vol. i. p. 313--320,) with some apprehension of violating the dignity of history.]

[Footnote 101: Et vastatis urbibus, hominibusque interfectis, solitudinem et raritatem bestiarum quoque fieri, et volatilium, pisciumque: testis Illyricum est, testis Thracia, testis in quo ortus sum solum, (Pannonia;) ubi praeter coelum et terram, et crescentes vepres, et condensa sylvarum cuncta perierunt. Tom. vii. p. 250, 1, Cap. Sophonias and tom. i. p. 26.]