

Chapter XXXI: Invasion Of Italy, Occupation Of Territories By Barbarians.--Part VI.

The personal animosities and hereditary feuds of the Barbarians were suspended by the strong necessity of their affairs; and the brave Adolphus, the brother-in-law of the deceased monarch, was unanimously elected to succeed to his throne. The character and political system of the new king of the Goths may be best understood from his own conversation with an illustrious citizen of Narbonne; who afterwards, in a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, related it to St. Jerom, in the presence of the historian Orosius. "In the full confidence of valor and victory, I once aspired (said Adolphus) to change the face of the universe; to obliterate the name of Rome; to erect on its ruins the dominion of the Goths; and to acquire, like Augustus, the immortal fame of the founder of a new empire. By repeated experiments, I was gradually convinced, that laws are essentially necessary to maintain and regulate a well-constituted state; and that the fierce, untractable humor of the Goths was incapable of bearing the salutary yoke of laws and civil government. From that moment I proposed to myself a different object of glory and ambition; and it is now my sincere wish that the gratitude of future ages should acknowledge the merit of a stranger, who employed the sword of the Goths, not to subvert, but to restore and maintain, the prosperity of the Roman empire." With these pacific views, the successor of Alaric suspended the operations of war; and seriously negotiated with the Imperial court a treaty of friendship and alliance. It was the interest of the ministers of Honorius, who were now released from

the obligation of their extravagant oath, to deliver Italy from the intolerable weight of the Gothic powers; and they readily accepted their service against the tyrants and Barbarians who infested the provinces beyond the Alps. Adolphus, assuming the character of a Roman general, directed his march from the extremity of Campania to the southern provinces of Gaul. His troops, either by force of agreement, immediately occupied the cities of Narbonne, Thoulouse, and Bordeaux; and though they were repulsed by Count Boniface from the walls of Marseilles, they soon extended their quarters from the Mediterranean to the Ocean. The oppressed provincials might exclaim, that the miserable remnant, which the enemy had spared, was cruelly ravished by their pretended allies; yet some specious colors were not wanting to palliate, or justify the violence of the Goths. The cities of Gaul, which they attacked, might perhaps be considered as in a state of rebellion against the government of Honorius: the articles of the treaty, or the secret instructions of the court, might sometimes be alleged in favor of the seeming usurpations of Adolphus; and the guilt of any irregular, unsuccessful act of hostility might always be imputed, with an appearance of truth, to the ungovernable spirit of a Barbarian host, impatient of peace or discipline. The luxury of Italy had been less effectual to soften the temper, than to relax the courage, of the Goths; and they had imbibed the vices, without imitating the arts and institutions, of civilized society.

The professions of Adolphus were probably sincere, and his attachment to the cause of the republic was secured by the ascendant which a Roman

princess had acquired over the heart and understanding of the Barbarian king. Placidia, the daughter of the great Theodosius, and of Galla, his second wife, had received a royal education in the palace of Constantinople; but the eventful story of her life is connected with the revolutions which agitated the Western empire under the reign of her brother Honorius. When Rome was first invested by the arms of Alaric, Placidia, who was then about twenty years of age, resided in the city; and her ready consent to the death of her cousin Serena has a cruel and ungrateful appearance, which, according to the circumstances of the action, may be aggravated, or excused, by the consideration of her tender age. The victorious Barbarians detained, either as a hostage or a captive, the sister of Honorius; but, while she was exposed to the disgrace of following round Italy the motions of a Gothic camp, she experienced, however, a decent and respectful treatment. The authority of Jornandes, who praises the beauty of Placidia, may perhaps be counterbalanced by the silence, the expressive silence, of her flatterers: yet the splendor of her birth, the bloom of youth, the elegance of manners, and the dexterous insinuation which she condescended to employ, made a deep impression on the mind of Adolphus; and the Gothic king aspired to call himself the brother of the emperor. The ministers of Honorius rejected with disdain the proposal of an alliance so injurious to every sentiment of Roman pride; and repeatedly urged the restitution of Placidia, as an indispensable condition of the treaty of peace. But the daughter of Theodosius submitted, without reluctance, to the desires of the conqueror, a young and valiant prince,

who yielded to Alaric in loftiness of stature, but who excelled in the more attractive qualities of grace and beauty. The marriage of Adolphus and Placidia was consummated before the Goths retired from Italy; and the solemn, perhaps the anniversary day of their nuptials was afterwards celebrated in the house of Ingenuus, one of the most illustrious citizens of Narbonne in Gaul. The bride, attired and adorned like a Roman empress, was placed on a throne of state; and the king of the Goths, who assumed, on this occasion, the Roman habit, contented himself with a less honorable seat by her side. The nuptial gift, which, according to the custom of his nation, was offered to Placidia, consisted of the rare and magnificent spoils of her country. Fifty beautiful youths, in silken robes, carried a basin in each hand; and one of these basins was filled with pieces of gold, the other with precious stones of an inestimable value. Attalus, so long the sport of fortune, and of the Goths, was appointed to lead the chorus of the Hymeneal song; and the degraded emperor might aspire to the praise of a skilful musician. The Barbarians enjoyed the insolence of their triumph; and the provincials rejoiced in this alliance, which tempered, by the mild influence of love and reason, the fierce spirit of their Gothic lord.

The hundred basins of gold and gems, presented to Placidia at her nuptial feast, formed an inconsiderable portion of the Gothic treasures; of which some extraordinary specimens may be selected from the history of the successors of Adolphus. Many curious and costly ornaments of pure gold, enriched with jewels, were found in their palace of Narbonne, when it was pillaged, in the sixth century, by the Franks: sixty cups, caps,

or chalices; fifteen patens, or plates, for the use of the communion; twenty boxes, or cases, to hold the books of the Gospels: this consecrated wealth was distributed by the son of Clovis among the churches of his dominions, and his pious liberality seems to upbraid some former sacrilege of the Goths. They possessed, with more security of conscience, the famous missorium, or great dish for the service of the table, of massy gold, of the weight of five hundred pounds, and of far superior value, from the precious stones, the exquisite workmanship, and the tradition, that it had been presented by Ætius, the patrician, to Torismond, king of the Goths. One of the successors of Torismond purchased the aid of the French monarch by the promise of this magnificent gift. When he was seated on the throne of Spain, he delivered it with reluctance to the ambassadors of Dagobert; despoiled them on the road; stipulated, after a long negotiation, the inadequate ransom of two hundred thousand pieces of gold; and preserved the missorium, as the pride of the Gothic treasury. When that treasury, after the conquest of Spain, was plundered by the Arabs, they admired, and they have celebrated, another object still more remarkable; a table of considerable size, of one single piece of solid emerald, encircled with three rows of fine pearls, supported by three hundred and sixty-five feet of gems and massy gold, and estimated at the price of five hundred thousand pieces of gold. Some portion of the Gothic treasures might be the gift of friendship, or the tribute of obedience; but the far greater part had been the fruits of war and rapine, the spoils of the empire, and perhaps of Rome.

After the deliverance of Italy from the oppression of the Goths, some secret counsellor was permitted, amidst the factions of the palace, to heal the wounds of that afflicted country. By a wise and humane regulation, the eight provinces which had been the most deeply injured, Campania, Tuscany, Picenum, Samnium, Apulia, Calabria, Bruttium, and Lucania, obtained an indulgence of five years: the ordinary tribute was reduced to one fifth, and even that fifth was destined to restore and support the useful institution of the public posts. By another law, the lands which had been left without inhabitants or cultivation, were granted, with some diminution of taxes, to the neighbors who should occupy, or the strangers who should solicit them; and the new possessors were secured against the future claims of the fugitive proprietors.

About the same time a general amnesty was published in the name of Honorius, to abolish the guilt and memory of all the involuntary offences which had been committed by his unhappy subjects, during the term of the public disorder and calamity. A decent and respectful attention was paid to the restoration of the capital; the citizens were encouraged to rebuild the edifices which had been destroyed or damaged by hostile fire; and extraordinary supplies of corn were imported from the coast of Africa. The crowds that so lately fled before the sword of the Barbarians, were soon recalled by the hopes of plenty and pleasure; and Albinus, præfect of Rome, informed the court, with some anxiety and surprise, that, in a single day, he had taken an account of the arrival of fourteen thousand strangers. In less than seven years, the vestiges of the Gothic invasion were almost obliterated; and the city appeared to resume its former splendor and tranquillity. The venerable matron

replaced her crown of laurel, which had been ruffled by the storms of war; and was still amused, in the last moment of her decay, with the prophecies of revenge, of victory, and of eternal dominion.

This apparent tranquillity was soon disturbed by the approach of a hostile armament from the country which afforded the daily subsistence of the Roman people. Heraclian, count of Africa, who, under the most difficult and distressful circumstances, had supported, with active loyalty, the cause of Honorius, was tempted, in the year of his consulship, to assume the character of a rebel, and the title of emperor. The ports of Africa were immediately filled with the naval forces, at the head of which he prepared to invade Italy: and his fleet, when it cast anchor at the mouth of the Tyber, indeed surpassed the fleets of Xerxes and Alexander, if all the vessels, including the royal galley, and the smallest boat, did actually amount to the incredible number of three thousand two hundred. Yet with such an armament, which might have subverted, or restored, the greatest empires of the earth, the African usurper made a very faint and feeble impression on the provinces of his rival. As he marched from the port, along the road which leads to the gates of Rome, he was encountered, terrified, and routed, by one of the Imperial captains; and the lord of this mighty host, deserting his fortune and his friends, ignominiously fled with a single ship. When Heraclian landed in the harbor of Carthage, he found that the whole province, disdainful of such an unworthy ruler, had returned to their allegiance. The rebel was beheaded in the ancient temple of Memory his consulship was abolished: and the remains of his private

fortune, not exceeding the moderate sum of four thousand pounds of gold, were granted to the brave Constantius, who had already defended the throne, which he afterwards shared with his feeble sovereign. Honorius viewed, with supine indifference, the calamities of Rome and Italy; but the rebellious attempts of Attalus and Heraclian, against his personal safety, awakened, for a moment, the torpid instinct of his nature. He was probably ignorant of the causes and events which preserved him from these impending dangers; and as Italy was no longer invaded by any foreign or domestic enemies, he peaceably existed in the palace of Ravenna, while the tyrants beyond the Alps were repeatedly vanquished in the name, and by the lieutenants, of the son of Theodosius. In the course of a busy and interesting narrative I might possibly forget to mention the death of such a prince: and I shall therefore take the precaution of observing, in this place, that he survived the last siege of Rome about thirteen years.

The usurpation of Constantine, who received the purple from the legions of Britain, had been successful, and seemed to be secure. His title was acknowledged, from the wall of Antoninus to the columns of Hercules; and, in the midst of the public disorder he shared the dominion, and the plunder, of Gaul and Spain, with the tribes of Barbarians, whose destructive progress was no longer checked by the Rhine or Pyrenees. Stained with the blood of the kinsmen of Honorius, he extorted, from the court of Ravenna, with which he secretly corresponded, the ratification of his rebellious claims Constantine engaged himself, by a solemn promise, to deliver Italy from the Goths; advanced as far as the banks



of the Po; and after alarming, rather than assisting, his pusillanimous ally, hastily returned to the palace of Arles, to celebrate, with intemperate luxury, his vain and ostentatious triumph. But this transient prosperity was soon interrupted and destroyed by the revolt of Count Gerontius, the bravest of his generals; who, during the absence of his son Constants, a prince already invested with the Imperial purple, had been left to command in the provinces of Spain. From some reason, of which we are ignorant, Gerontius, instead of assuming the diadem, placed it on the head of his friend Maximus, who fixed his residence at Tarragona, while the active count pressed forwards, through the Pyrenees, to surprise the two emperors, Constantine and Constans, before they could prepare for their defence. The son was made prisoner at Vienna, and immediately put to death: and the unfortunate youth had scarcely leisure to deplore the elevation of his family; which had tempted, or compelled him, sacrilegiously to desert the peaceful obscurity of the monastic life. The father maintained a siege within the walls of Arles; but those walls must have yielded to the assailants, had not the city been unexpectedly relieved by the approach of an Italian army. The name of Honorius, the proclamation of a lawful emperor, astonished the contending parties of the rebels. Gerontius, abandoned by his own troops, escaped to the confines of Spain; and rescued his name from oblivion, by the Roman courage which appeared to animate the last moments of his life. In the middle of the night, a great body of his perfidious soldiers surrounded and attacked his house, which he had strongly barricaded. His wife, a valiant friend of the nation of the Alani, and some faithful slaves, were still attached to his person; and

he used, with so much skill and resolution, a large magazine of darts and arrows, that above three hundred of the assailants lost their lives in the attempt. His slaves when all the missile weapons were spent, fled at the dawn of day; and Gerontius, if he had not been restrained by conjugal tenderness, might have imitated their example; till the soldiers, provoked by such obstinate resistance, applied fire on all sides to the house. In this fatal extremity, he complied with the request of his Barbarian friend, and cut off his head. The wife of Gerontius, who conjured him not to abandon her to a life of misery and disgrace, eagerly presented her neck to his sword; and the tragic scene was terminated by the death of the count himself, who, after three ineffectual strokes, drew a short dagger, and sheathed it in his heart. The unprotected Maximus, whom he had invested with the purple, was indebted for his life to the contempt that was entertained of his power and abilities. The caprice of the Barbarians, who ravaged Spain, once more seated this Imperial phantom on the throne: but they soon resigned him to the justice of Honorius; and the tyrant Maximus, after he had been shown to the people of Ravenna and Rome, was publicly executed.

The general, (Constantius was his name,) who raised by his approach the siege of Arles, and dissipated the troops of Gerontius, was born a Roman; and this remarkable distinction is strongly expressive of the decay of military spirit among the subjects of the empire. The strength and majesty which were conspicuous in the person of that general, marked him, in the popular opinion, as a candidate worthy of the throne, which he afterwards ascended. In the familiar intercourse of private life, his

manners were cheerful and engaging; nor would he sometimes disdain, in the license of convivial mirth, to vie with the pantomimes themselves, in the exercises of their ridiculous profession. But when the trumpet summoned him to arms; when he mounted his horse, and, bending down (for such was his singular practice) almost upon the neck, fiercely rolled his large animated eyes round the field, Constantius then struck terror into his foes, and inspired his soldiers with the assurance of victory. He had received from the court of Ravenna the important commission of extirpating rebellion in the provinces of the West; and the pretended emperor Constantine, after enjoying a short and anxious respite, was again besieged in his capital by the arms of a more formidable enemy. Yet this interval allowed time for a successful negotiation with the Franks and Alemanni and his ambassador, Edobic, soon returned at the head of an army, to disturb the operations of the siege of Arles. The Roman general, instead of expecting the attack in his lines, boldly and perhaps wisely, resolved to pass the Rhone, and to meet the Barbarians. His measures were conducted with so much skill and secrecy, that, while they engaged the infantry of Constantius in the front, they were suddenly attacked, surrounded, and destroyed, by the cavalry of his lieutenant Ulphilas, who had silently gained an advantageous post in their rear. The remains of the army of Edobic were preserved by flight or submission, and their leader escaped from the field of battle to the house of a faithless friend; who too clearly understood, that the head of his obnoxious guest would be an acceptable and lucrative present for the Imperial general. On this occasion, Constantius behaved with the magnanimity of a genuine Roman. Subduing, or suppressing, every

sentiment of jealousy, he publicly acknowledged the merit and services of Ulphilas; but he turned with horror from the assassin of Edobic; and sternly intimated his commands, that the camp should no longer be polluted by the presence of an ungrateful wretch, who had violated the laws of friendship and hospitality. The usurper, who beheld, from the walls of Arles, the ruin of his last hopes, was tempted to place some confidence in so generous a conqueror. He required a solemn promise for his security; and after receiving, by the imposition of hands, the sacred character of a Christian Presbyter, he ventured to open the gates of the city. But he soon experienced that the principles of honor and integrity, which might regulate the ordinary conduct of Constantius, were superseded by the loose doctrines of political morality. The Roman general, indeed, refused to sully his laurels with the blood of Constantine; but the abdicated emperor, and his son Julian, were sent under a strong guard into Italy; and before they reached the palace of Ravenna, they met the ministers of death.

At a time when it was universally confessed, that almost every man in the empire was superior in personal merit to the princes whom the accident of their birth had seated on the throne, a rapid succession of usurpers, regardless of the fate of their predecessors, still continued to arise. This mischief was peculiarly felt in the provinces of Spain and Gaul, where the principles of order and obedience had been extinguished by war and rebellion. Before Constantine resigned the purple, and in the fourth month of the siege of Arles, intelligence was received in the Imperial camp, that Jovinus has assumed the diadem at

Mentz, in the Upper Germany, at the instigation of Goar, king of the Alani, and of Guntiarus, king of the Burgundians; and that the candidate, on whom they had bestowed the empire, advanced with a formidable host of Barbarians, from the banks of the Rhine to those of the Rhone. Every circumstance is dark and extraordinary in the short history of the reign of Jovinus. It was natural to expect, that a brave and skilful general, at the head of a victorious army, would have asserted, in a field of battle, the justice of the cause of Honorius. The hasty retreat of Constantius might be justified by weighty reasons; but he resigned, without a struggle, the possession of Gaul; and Dardanus, the Prætorian præfect, is recorded as the only magistrate who refused to yield obedience to the usurper. When the Goths, two years after the siege of Rome, established their quarters in Gaul, it was natural to suppose that their inclinations could be divided only between the emperor Honorius, with whom they had formed a recent alliance, and the degraded Attalus, whom they reserved in their camp for the occasional purpose of acting the part of a musician or a monarch. Yet in a moment of disgust, (for which it is not easy to assign a cause, or a date,) Adolphus connected himself with the usurper of Gaul; and imposed on Attalus the ignominious task of negotiating the treaty, which ratified his own disgrace. We are again surprised to read, that, instead of considering the Gothic alliance as the firmest support of his throne, Jovinus upbraided, in dark and ambiguous language, the officious importunity of Attalus; that, scorning the advice of his great ally, he invested with the purple his brother Sebastian; and that he most imprudently accepted the service of Sarus, when that gallant chief, the

soldier of Honorius, was provoked to desert the court of a prince, who knew not how to reward or punish. Adolphus, educated among a race of warriors, who esteemed the duty of revenge as the most precious and sacred portion of their inheritance, advanced with a body of ten thousand Goths to encounter the hereditary enemy of the house of Balti. He attacked Sarus at an unguarded moment, when he was accompanied only by eighteen or twenty of his valiant followers. United by friendship, animated by despair, but at length oppressed by multitudes, this band of heroes deserved the esteem, without exciting the compassion, of their enemies; and the lion was no sooner taken in the toils, than he was instantly despatched. The death of Sarus dissolved the loose alliance which Adolphus still maintained with the usurpers of Gaul. He again listened to the dictates of love and prudence; and soon satisfied the brother of Placidia, by the assurance that he would immediately transmit to the palace of Ravenna the heads of the two tyrants, Jovinus and Sebastian. The king of the Goths executed his promise without difficulty or delay; the helpless brothers, unsupported by any personal merit, were abandoned by their Barbarian auxiliaries; and the short opposition of Valentia was expiated by the ruin of one of the noblest cities of Gaul. The emperor, chosen by the Roman senate, who had been promoted, degraded, insulted, restored, again degraded, and again insulted, was finally abandoned to his fate; but when the Gothic king withdrew his protection, he was restrained, by pity or contempt, from offering any violence to the person of Attalus. The unfortunate Attalus, who was left without subjects or allies, embarked in one of the ports of Spain, in search of some secure and solitary retreat: but he was intercepted at

sea, conducted to the presence of Honorius, led in triumph through the streets of Rome or Ravenna, and publicly exposed to the gazing multitude, on the second step of the throne of his invincible conqueror. The same measure of punishment, with which, in the days of his prosperity, he was accused of menacing his rival, was inflicted on Attalus himself; he was condemned, after the amputation of two fingers, to a perpetual exile in the Isle of Lipari, where he was supplied with the decent necessaries of life. The remainder of the reign of Honorius was undisturbed by rebellion; and it may be observed, that, in the space of five years, seven usurpers had yielded to the fortune of a prince, who was himself incapable either of counsel or of action.