

Chapter XLI: Conquests Of Justinian, Charact Of Balisarius.--Part V.

As soon as Belisarius was delivered from his foreign and domestic enemies, he seriously applied his forces to the final reduction of Italy. In the siege of Osimo, the general was nearly transpierced with an arrow, if the mortal stroke had not been intercepted by one of his guards, who lost, in that pious office, the use of his hand. The Goths of Osimo, [1041] four thousand warriors, with those of Faesulae and the Cottian Alps, were among the last who maintained their independence; and their gallant resistance, which almost tired the patience, deserved the esteem, of the conqueror. His prudence refused to subscribe the safe conduct which they asked, to join their brethren of Ravenna; but they saved, by an honorable capitulation, one moiety at least of their wealth, with the free alternative of retiring peaceably to their estates, or enlisting to serve the emperor in his Persian wars. The multitudes which yet adhered to the standard of Vitiges far surpassed the number of the Roman troops; but neither prayers nor defiance, nor the extreme danger of his most faithful subjects, could tempt the Gothic king beyond the fortifications of Ravenna. These fortifications were, indeed, impregnable to the assaults of art or violence; and when Belisarius invested the capital, he was soon convinced that famine only could tame the stubborn spirit of the Barbarians. The sea, the land, and the channels of the Po, were guarded by the vigilance of the Roman general; and his morality extended the rights of war to the practice of poisoning the waters, [105] and secretly firing the granaries [106] of a besieged city. [107] While he pressed the blockade of Ravenna, he was

surprised by the arrival of two ambassadors from Constantinople, with a treaty of peace, which Justinian had imprudently signed, without deigning to consult the author of his victory. By this disgraceful and precarious agreement, Italy and the Gothic treasure were divided, and the provinces beyond the Po were left with the regal title to the successor of Theodoric. The ambassadors were eager to accomplish their salutary commission; the captive Vitiges accepted, with transport, the unexpected offer of a crown; honor was less prevalent among the Goths, than the want and appetite of food; and the Roman chiefs, who murmured at the continuance of the war, professed implicit submission to the commands of the emperor. If Belisarius had possessed only the courage of a soldier, the laurel would have been snatched from his hand by timid and envious counsels; but in this decisive moment, he resolved, with the magnanimity of a statesman, to sustain alone the danger and merit of generous disobedience. Each of his officers gave a written opinion that the siege of Ravenna was impracticable and hopeless: the general then rejected the treaty of partition, and declared his own resolution of leading Vitiges in chains to the feet of Justinian. The Goths retired with doubt and dismay: this peremptory refusal deprived them of the only signature which they could trust, and filled their minds with a just apprehension, that a sagacious enemy had discovered the full extent of their deplorable state. They compared the fame and fortune of Belisarius with the weakness of their ill-fated king; and the comparison suggested an extraordinary project, to which Vitiges, with apparent resignation, was compelled to acquiesce. Partition would ruin the strength, exile would disgrace the honor, of the nation; but they offered their arms,

their treasures, and the fortifications of Ravenna, if Belisarius would disclaim the authority of a master, accept the choice of the Goths, and assume, as he had deserved, the kingdom of Italy. If the false lustre of a diadem could have tempted the loyalty of a faithful subject, his prudence must have foreseen the inconstancy of the Barbarians, and his rational ambition would prefer the safe and honorable station of a Roman general. Even the patience and seeming satisfaction with which he entertained a proposal of treason, might be susceptible of a malignant interpretation. But the lieutenant of Justinian was conscious of his own rectitude; he entered into a dark and crooked path, as it might lead to the voluntary submission of the Goths; and his dexterous policy persuaded them that he was disposed to comply with their wishes, without engaging an oath or a promise for the performance of a treaty which he secretly abhorred. The day of the surrender of Ravenna was stipulated by the Gothic ambassadors: a fleet, laden with provisions, sailed as a welcome guest into the deepest recess of the harbor: the gates were opened to the fancied king of Italy; and Belisarius, without meeting an enemy, triumphantly marched through the streets of an impregnable city. [108] The Romans were astonished by their success; the multitudes of tall and robust Barbarians were confounded by the image of their own patience and the masculine females, spitting in the faces of their sons and husbands, most bitterly reproached them for betraying their dominion and freedom to these pygmies of the south, contemptible in their numbers, diminutive in their stature. Before the Goths could recover from the first surprise, and claim the accomplishment of their doubtful hopes, the victor established his power in Ravenna, beyond the danger of

repentance and revolt.

[Footnote 1041: Auximum, p. 175.--M.]

[Footnote 105: In the siege of Auximum, he first labored to demolish an old aqueduct, and then cast into the stream, 1. dead bodies; 2. mischievous herbs; and 3. quicklime. (says Procopius, l. ii. c. 27) Yet both words are used as synonymous in Galen, Dioscorides, and Lucian, (Hen. Steph. Thesaur. Ling. Graec. tom. iii. p. 748.)]

[Footnote 106: The Goths suspected Mathasuintha as an accomplice in the mischief, which perhaps was occasioned by accidental lightning.]

[Footnote 107: In strict philosophy, a limitation of the rights of war seems to imply nonsense and contradiction. Grotius himself is lost in an idle distinction between the jus naturae and the jus gentium, between poison and infection. He balances in one scale the passages of Homer (Odys. A 259, &c.) and Florus, (l. ii. c. 20, No. 7, ult. ;) and in the other, the examples of Solon (Pausanias, l. x. c. 37) and Belisarius. See his great work De Jure Belli et Pacis, (l. iii. c. 4, s. 15, 16, 17, and in Barbeyrac's version, tom. ii. p. 257, &c.) Yet I can understand the benefit and validity of an agreement, tacit or express, mutually to abstain from certain modes of hostility. See the Amphictyonic oath in Aeschines, de falsa Legatione.]

[Footnote 108: Ravenna was taken, not in the year 540, but in the latter

end of 539; and Pagi (tom. ii. p. 569) is rectified by Muratori. (*Annali d'Italia*, tom. v. p. 62,) who proves from an original act on papyrus, (*Antiquit. Italiae Medii Aevi*, tom. ii. dissert. xxxii. p. 999--1007,) Maffei, (*Istoria Diplomat.* p. 155-160,) that before the third of January, 540, peace and free correspondence were restored between Ravenna and Faenza.] Vitiges, who perhaps had attempted to escape, was honorably guarded in his palace; [109] the flower of the Gothic youth was selected for the service of the emperor; the remainder of the people was dismissed to their peaceful habitations in the southern provinces; and a colony of Italians was invited to replenish the depopulated city. The submission of the capital was imitated in the towns and villages of Italy, which had not been subdued, or even visited, by the Romans; and the independent Goths, who remained in arms at Pavia and Verona, were ambitious only to become the subjects of Belisarius. But his inflexible loyalty rejected, except as the substitute of Justinian, their oaths of allegiance; and he was not offended by the reproach of their deputies, that he rather chose to be a slave than a king.

[Footnote 109: He was seized by John the Sanguinary, but an oath or sacrament was pledged for his safety in the Basilica Julii, (*Hist. Miscell.* l. xvii. in Muratori, tom. i. p. 107.) Anastasius (in *Vit. Pont.* p. 40) gives a dark but probable account. Montfaucon is quoted by Mascou (*Hist. of the Germans*, xii. 21) for a votive shield representing the captivity of Vitiges and now in the collection of Signor Landi at Rome.]

After the second victory of Belisarius, envy again whispered, Justinian listened, and the hero was recalled. "The remnant of the Gothic war was no longer worthy of his presence: a gracious sovereign was impatient to reward his services, and to consult his wisdom; and he alone was capable of defending the East against the innumerable armies of Persia." Belisarius understood the suspicion, accepted the excuse, embarked at Ravenna his spoils and trophies; and proved, by his ready obedience, that such an abrupt removal from the government of Italy was not less unjust than it might have been indiscreet. The emperor received with honorable courtesy both Vitiges and his more noble consort; and as the king of the Goths conformed to the Athanasian faith, he obtained, with a rich inheritance of land in Asia, the rank of senator and patrician. [110] Every spectator admired, without peril, the strength and stature of the young Barbarians: they adored the majesty of the throne, and promised to shed their blood in the service of their benefactor. Justinian deposited in the Byzantine palace the treasures of the Gothic monarchy. A flattering senate was sometime admitted to gaze on the magnificent spectacle; but it was enviously secluded from the public view: and the conqueror of Italy renounced, without a murmur, perhaps without a sigh, the well-earned honors of a second triumph. His glory was indeed exalted above all external pomp; and the faint and hollow praises of the court were supplied, even in a servile age, by the respect and admiration of his country. Whenever he appeared in the streets and public places of Constantinople, Belisarius attracted and satisfied the eyes of the people. His lofty stature and majestic countenance fulfilled their expectations of a hero; the meanest of his

fellow-citizens were emboldened by his gentle and gracious demeanor; and the martial train which attended his footsteps left his person more accessible than in a day of battle. Seven thousand horsemen, matchless for beauty and valor, were maintained in the service, and at the private expense, of the general. [111] Their prowess was always conspicuous in single combats, or in the foremost ranks; and both parties confessed that in the siege of Rome, the guards of Belisarius had alone vanquished the Barbarian host. Their numbers were continually augmented by the bravest and most faithful of the enemy; and his fortunate captives, the Vandals, the Moors, and the Goths, emulated the attachment of his domestic followers. By the union of liberality and justice, he acquired the love of the soldiers, without alienating the affections of the people. The sick and wounded were relieved with medicines and money; and still more efficaciously, by the healing visits and smiles of their commander. The loss of a weapon or a horse was instantly repaired, and each deed of valor was rewarded by the rich and honorable gifts of a bracelet or a collar, which were rendered more precious by the judgment of Belisarius. He was endeared to the husbandmen by the peace and plenty which they enjoyed under the shadow of his standard. Instead of being injured, the country was enriched by the march of the Roman armies; and such was the rigid discipline of their camp, that not an apple was gathered from the tree, not a path could be traced in the fields of corn. Belisarius was chaste and sober. In the license of a military life, none could boast that they had seen him intoxicated with wine: the most beautiful captives of Gothic or Vandal race were offered to his embraces; but he turned aside from their charms, and the husband of

Antonina was never suspected of violating the laws of conjugal fidelity. The spectator and historian of his exploits has observed, that amidst the perils of war, he was daring without rashness, prudent without fear, slow or rapid according to the exigencies of the moment; that in the deepest distress he was animated by real or apparent hope, but that he was modest and humble in the most prosperous fortune. By these virtues, he equalled or excelled the ancient masters of the military art.

Victory, by sea and land, attended his arms. He subdued Africa, Italy, and the adjacent islands; led away captives the successors of Genseric and Theodoric; filled Constantinople with the spoils of their palaces; and in the space of six years recovered half the provinces of the Western empire. In his fame and merit, in wealth and power, he remained without a rival, the first of the Roman subjects; the voice of envy could only magnify his dangerous importance; and the emperor might applaud his own discerning spirit, which had discovered and raised the genius of Belisarius. [Footnote 110: Vitiges lived two years at Constantinople, and imperatoris in affectu convictus (or conjunctus) rebus excessit humanis. His widow Mathasuenta, the wife and mother of the patricians, the elder and younger Germanus, united the streams of Anician and Amali blood, (Jornandes, c. 60, p. 221, in Muratori, tom. i.)]

[Footnote 111: Procopius, Goth. 1. iii. c. 1. Aimoin, a French monk of the xith century, who had obtained, and has disfigured, some authentic information of Belisarius, mentions, in his name, 12,000, pueri or slaves--quos propriis alimus stipendiis--besides 18,000 soldiers,



(Historians of France, tom. iii. De Gestis Franc. 1. ii. c. 6, p. 48.)]

It was the custom of the Roman triumphs, that a slave should be placed behind the chariot to remind the conqueror of the instability of fortune, and the infirmities of human nature. Procopius, in his Anecdotes, has assumed that servile and ungrateful office. The generous reader may cast away the libel, but the evidence of facts will adhere to his memory; and he will reluctantly confess, that the fame, and even the virtue, of Belisarius, were polluted by the lust and cruelty of his wife; and that hero deserved an appellation which may not drop from the pen of the decent historian. The mother of Antonina [112] was a theatrical prostitute, and both her father and grandfather exercised, at Thessalonica and Constantinople, the vile, though lucrative, profession of charioteers. In the various situations of their fortune she became the companion, the enemy, the servant, and the favorite of the empress Theodora: these loose and ambitious females had been connected by similar pleasures; they were separated by the jealousy of vice, and at length reconciled by the partnership of guilt. Before her marriage with Belisarius, Antonina had one husband and many lovers: Photius, the son of her former nuptials, was of an age to distinguish himself at the siege of Naples; and it was not till the autumn of her age and beauty [113] that she indulged a scandalous attachment to a Thracian youth. Theodosius had been educated in the Eunomian heresy; the African voyage was consecrated by the baptism and auspicious name of the first soldier who embarked; and the proselyte was adopted into the family of his spiritual parents, [114] Belisarius and Antonina. Before they touched

the shores of Africa, this holy kindred degenerated into sensual love: and as Antonina soon overleaped the bounds of modesty and caution, the Roman general was alone ignorant of his own dishonor. During their residence at Carthage, he surprised the two lovers in a subterraneous chamber, solitary, warm, and almost naked. Anger flashed from his eyes. "With the help of this young man," said the unblushing Antonina, "I was secreting our most precious effects from the knowledge of Justinian." The youth resumed his garments, and the pious husband consented to disbelieve the evidence of his own senses. From this pleasing and perhaps voluntary delusion, Belisarius was awakened at Syracuse, by the officious information of Macedonia; and that female attendant, after requiring an oath for her security, produced two chamberlains, who, like herself, had often beheld the adulteries of Antonina. A hasty flight into Asia saved Theodosius from the justice of an injured husband, who had signified to one of his guards the order of his death; but the tears of Antonina, and her artful seductions, assured the credulous hero of her innocence: and he stooped, against his faith and judgment, to abandon those imprudent friends, who had presumed to accuse or doubt the chastity of his wife. The revenge of a guilty woman is implacable and bloody: the unfortunate Macedonia, with the two witnesses, were secretly arrested by the minister of her cruelty; their tongues were cut out, their bodies were hacked into small pieces, and their remains were cast into the Sea of Syracuse. A rash though judicious saying of Constantine, "I would sooner have punished the adulteress than the boy," was deeply remembered by Antonina; and two years afterwards, when despair had armed that officer against his general, her sanguinary advice decided and

hastened his execution. Even the indignation of Photius was not forgiven by his mother; the exile of her son prepared the recall of her lover; and Theodosius condescended to accept the pressing and humble invitation of the conqueror of Italy. In the absolute direction of his household, and in the important commissions of peace and war, [115] the favorite youth most rapidly acquired a fortune of four hundred thousand pounds sterling; and after their return to Constantinople, the passion of Antonina, at least, continued ardent and unabated. But fear, devotion, and lassitude perhaps, inspired Theodosius with more serious thoughts. He dreaded the busy scandal of the capital, and the indiscreet fondness of the wife of Belisarius; escaped from her embraces, and retiring to Ephesus, shaved his head, and took refuge in the sanctuary of a monastic life. The despair of the new Ariadne could scarcely have been excused by the death of her husband. She wept, she tore her hair, she filled the palace with her cries; "she had lost the dearest of friends, a tender, a faithful, a laborious friend!" But her warm entreaties, fortified by the prayers of Belisarius, were insufficient to draw the holy monk from the solitude of Ephesus. It was not till the general moved forward for the Persian war, that Theodosius could be tempted to return to Constantinople; and the short interval before the departure of Antonina herself was boldly devoted to love and pleasure. [Footnote 112: The diligence of Alemannus could add but little to the four first and most curious chapters of the Anecdotes. Of these strange Anecdotes, a part may be true, because probable--and a part true, because improbable. Procopius must have known the former, and the latter he could scarcely invent. Note: The malice of court scandal is proverbially inventive; and

of such scandal the "Anecdota" may be an embellished record.--M.]

[Footnote 113: Procopius intimates (Anecdot. c. 4) that when Belisarius returned to Italy, (A.D. 543,) Antonina was sixty years of age. A forced, but more polite construction, which refers that date to the moment when he was writing, (A.D. 559,) would be compatible with the manhood of Photius, (Gothic. 1. i. c. 10) in 536.]

[Footnote 114: Compare the Vandalic War (l. i. c. 12) with the Anecdotes (c. i.) and Alemannus, (p. 2, 3.) This mode of baptismal adoption was revived by Leo the philosopher.]

[Footnote 115: In November, 537, Photius arrested the pope, (Liberat. Brev. c. 22. Pagi, tom. ii. p. 562) About the end of 539, Belisarius sent Theodosius on an important and lucrative commission to Ravenna, (Goth. 1. ii. c. 18.)]

A philosopher may pity and forgive the infirmities of female nature, from which he receives no real injury: but contemptible is the husband who feels, and yet endures, his own infamy in that of his wife. Antonina pursued her son with implacable hatred; and the gallant Photius [116] was exposed to her secret persecutions in the camp beyond the Tigris. Enraged by his own wrongs, and by the dishonor of his blood, he cast away in his turn the sentiments of nature, and revealed to Belisarius the turpitude of a woman who had violated all the duties of a mother and a wife. From the surprise and indignation of the Roman general, his

former credulity appears to have been sincere: he embraced the knees of the son of Antonina, adjured him to remember his obligations rather than his birth, and confirmed at the altar their holy vows of revenge and mutual defence. The dominion of Antonina was impaired by absence; and when she met her husband, on his return from the Persian confines, Belisarius, in his first and transient emotions, confined her person, and threatened her life. Photius was more resolved to punish, and less prompt to pardon: he flew to Ephesus; extorted from a trusty eunuch of his another the full confession of her guilt; arrested Theodosius and his treasures in the church of St. John the Apostle, and concealed his captives, whose execution was only delayed, in a secure and sequestered fortress of Cilicia. Such a daring outrage against public justice could not pass with impunity; and the cause of Antonina was espoused by the empress, whose favor she had deserved by the recent services of the disgrace of a praefect, and the exile and murder of a pope. At the end of the campaign, Belisarius was recalled; he complied, as usual, with the Imperial mandate. His mind was not prepared for rebellion: his obedience, however adverse to the dictates of honor, was consonant to the wishes of his heart; and when he embraced his wife, at the command, and perhaps in the presence, of the empress, the tender husband was disposed to forgive or to be forgiven. The bounty of Theodora reserved for her companion a more precious favor. "I have found," she said, "my dearest patrician, a pearl of inestimable value; it has not yet been viewed by any mortal eye; but the sight and the possession of this jewel are destined for my friend." [1161] As soon as the curiosity and impatience of Antonina were kindled, the door of a bed-chamber was

thrown open, and she beheld her lover, whom the diligence of the eunuchs had discovered in his secret prison. Her silent wonder burst into passionate exclamations of gratitude and joy, and she named Theodora her queen, her benefactress, and her savior. The monk of Ephesus was nourished in the palace with luxury and ambition; but instead of assuming, as he was promised, the command of the Roman armies, Theodosius expired in the first fatigues of an amorous interview. [1162] The grief of Antonina could only be assuaged by the sufferings of her son. A youth of consular rank, and a sickly constitution, was punished, without a trial, like a malefactor and a slave: yet such was the constancy of his mind, that Photius sustained the tortures of the scourge and the rack, [1163] without violating the faith which he had sworn to Belisarius. After this fruitless cruelty, the son of Antonina, while his mother feasted with the empress, was buried in her subterraneous prisons, which admitted not the distinction of night and day. He twice escaped to the most venerable sanctuaries of Constantinople, the churches of St. Sophia, and of the Virgin: but his tyrants were insensible of religion as of pity; and the helpless youth, amidst the clamors of the clergy and people, was twice dragged from the altar to the dungeon. His third attempt was more successful. At the end of three years, the prophet Zachariah, or some mortal friend, indicated the means of an escape: he eluded the spies and guards of the empress, reached the holy sepulchre of Jerusalem, embraced the profession of a monk; and the abbot Photius was employed, after the death of Justinian, to reconcile and regulate the churches of Egypt. The son of Antonina suffered all that an enemy can inflict: her patient husband imposed on

himself the more exquisite misery of violating his promise and deserting his friend.

[Footnote 116: Theophanes (Chronograph. p. 204) styles him Photinus, the son-in-law of Belisarius; and he is copied by the *Historia Miscella* and *Anastasius*.]

[Footnote 1161: This and much of the private scandal in the "Anecdota" is liable to serious doubt. Who reported all these private conversations, and how did they reach the ears of Procopius?--M.]

[Footnote 1162: This is a strange misrepresentation--he died of a dysentery; nor does it appear that it was immediately after this scene. Antonina proposed to raise him to the generalship of the army. *Procop. Anecd.* p. 14. The sudden change from the abstemious diet of a monk to the luxury of the court is a much more probable cause of his death.--M.]

[Footnote 1163: The expression of Procopius does not appear to me to mean this kind of torture. *Ibid.*--M.]

In the succeeding campaign, Belisarius was again sent against the Persians: he saved the East, but he offended Theodora, and perhaps the emperor himself. The malady of Justinian had countenanced the rumor of his death; and the Roman general, on the supposition of that probable event spoke the free language of a citizen and a soldier. His colleague Buzes, who concurred in the same sentiments, lost his rank, his liberty,

and his health, by the persecution of the empress: but the disgrace of Belisarius was alleviated by the dignity of his own character, and the influence of his wife, who might wish to humble, but could not desire to ruin, the partner of her fortunes. Even his removal was colored by the assurance, that the sinking state of Italy would be retrieved by the single presence of its conqueror.

But no sooner had he returned, alone and defenceless, than a hostile commission was sent to the East, to seize his treasures and criminate his actions; the guards and veterans, who followed his private banner, were distributed among the chiefs of the army, and even the eunuchs presumed to cast lots for the partition of his martial domestics.

When he passed with a small and sordid retinue through the streets of Constantinople, his forlorn appearance excited the amazement and compassion of the people. Justinian and Theodora received him with cold ingratitude; the servile crowd, with insolence and contempt; and in the evening he retired with trembling steps to his deserted palace. An indisposition, feigned or real, had confined Antonina to her apartment; and she walked disdainfully silent in the adjacent portico, while Belisarius threw himself on his bed, and expected, in an agony of grief and terror, the death which he had so often braved under the walls of Rome. Long after sunset a messenger was announced from the empress: he opened, with anxious curiosity, the letter which contained the sentence of his fate. "You cannot be ignorant how much you have deserved my displeasure. I am not insensible of the services of Antonina. To her merits and intercession I have granted your life, and permit you to



retain a part of your treasures, which might be justly forfeited to the state. Let your gratitude, where it is due, be displayed, not in words, but in your future behavior." I know not how to believe or to relate the transports with which the hero is said to have received this ignominious pardon. He fell prostrate before his wife, he kissed the feet of his savior, and he devoutly promised to live the grateful and submissive slave of Antonina. A fine of one hundred and twenty thousand pounds sterling was levied on the fortunes of Belisarius; and with the office of count, or master of the royal stables, he accepted the conduct of the Italian war. At his departure from Constantinople, his friends, and even the public, were persuaded that as soon as he regained his freedom, he would renounce his dissimulation, and that his wife, Theodora, and perhaps the emperor himself, would be sacrificed to the just revenge of a virtuous rebel. Their hopes were deceived; and the unconquerable patience and loyalty of Belisarius appear either below or above the character of a man. [117]

[Footnote 117: The continuator of the Chronicle of Marcellinus gives, in a few decent words, the substance of the Anecdotes: *Belisarius de Oriente evocatus, in offensam periculumque incurrens grave, et invidiae subeacens rursus remittitur in Italiam, (p. 54.)*]