

Chapter XLIII: Last Victory And Death Of Belisarius, Death Of Justinian.--Part I.

Rebellions Of Africa.--Restoration Of The Gothic Kingdom By Totila.--Loss And Recovery Of Rome.--Final Conquest Of Italy By Narses.--Extinction Of The Ostrogoths.--Defeat Of The Franks And Alemanni.--Last Victory, Disgrace, And Death Of Belisarius.--Death And Character Of Justinian.--Comet, Earthquakes, And Plague.

The review of the nations from the Danube to the Nile has exposed, on every side, the weakness of the Romans; and our wonder is reasonably excited that they should presume to enlarge an empire whose ancient limits they were incapable of defending. But the wars, the conquests, and the triumphs of Justinian, are the feeble and pernicious efforts of old age, which exhaust the remains of strength, and accelerate the decay of the powers of life. He exulted in the glorious act of restoring Africa and Italy to the republic; but the calamities which followed the departure of Belisarius betrayed the impotence of the conqueror, and accomplished the ruin of those unfortunate countries.

From his new acquisitions, Justinian expected that his avarice, as well as pride, should be richly gratified. A rapacious minister of the finances closely pursued the footsteps of Belisarius; and as the old registers of tribute had been burnt by the Vandals, he indulged his fancy in a liberal calculation and arbitrary assessment of the wealth of Africa. [1] The increase of taxes, which were drawn away by a distant

sovereign, and a general resumption of the patrimony or crown lands, soon dispelled the intoxication of the public joy: but the emperor was insensible to the modest complaints of the people, till he was awakened and alarmed by the clamors of military discontent. Many of the Roman soldiers had married the widows and daughters of the Vandals. As their own, by the double right of conquest and inheritance, they claimed the estates which Genseric had assigned to his victorious troops. They heard with disdain the cold and selfish representations of their officers, that the liberality of Justinian had raised them from a savage or servile condition; that they were already enriched by the spoils of Africa, the treasure, the slaves, and the movables of the vanquished Barbarians; and that the ancient and lawful patrimony of the emperors would be applied only to the support of that government on which their own safety and reward must ultimately depend. The mutiny was secretly inflamed by a thousand soldiers, for the most part Heruli, who had imbibed the doctrines, and were instigated by the clergy, of the Arian sect; and the cause of perjury and rebellion was sanctified by the dispensing powers of fanaticism. The Arians deplored the ruin of their church, triumphant above a century in Africa; and they were justly provoked by the laws of the conqueror, which interdicted the baptism of their children, and the exercise of all religious worship. Of the Vandals chosen by Belisarius, the far greater part, in the honors of the Eastern service, forgot their country and religion. But a generous band of four hundred obliged the mariners, when they were in sight of the Isle of Lesbos, to alter their course: they touched on Peloponnesus, ran ashore on a desert coast of Africa, and boldly erected, on Mount

Aurasius, the standard of independence and revolt. While the troops of the provinces disclaimed the commands of their superiors, a conspiracy was formed at Carthage against the life of Solomon, who filled with honor the place of Belisarius; and the Arians had piously resolved to sacrifice the tyrant at the foot of the altar, during the awful mysteries of the festival of Easter. Fear or remorse restrained the daggers of the assassins, but the patience of Solomon emboldened their discontent; and, at the end of ten days, a furious sedition was kindled in the Circus, which desolated Africa above ten years. The pillage of the city, and the indiscriminate slaughter of its inhabitants, were suspended only by darkness, sleep, and intoxication: the governor, with seven companions, among whom was the historian Procopius, escaped to Sicily: two thirds of the army were involved in the guilt of treason; and eight thousand insurgents, assembling in the field of Bulla, elected Stozza for their chief, a private soldier, who possessed in a superior degree the virtues of a rebel. Under the mask of freedom, his eloquence could lead, or at least impel, the passions of his equals. He raised himself to a level with Belisarius, and the nephew of the emperor, by daring to encounter them in the field; and the victorious generals were compelled to acknowledge that Stozza deserved a purer cause, and a more legitimate command. Vanquished in battle, he dexterously employed the arts of negotiation; a Roman army was seduced from their allegiance, and the chiefs who had trusted to his faithless promise were murdered by his order in a church of Numidia. When every resource, either of force or perfidy, was exhausted, Stozza, with some desperate Vandals, retired to the wilds of Mauritania, obtained the daughter of a Barbarian prince,

and eluded the pursuit of his enemies, by the report of his death. The personal weight of Belisarius, the rank, the spirit, and the temper, of Germanus, the emperor's nephew, and the vigor and success of the second administration of the eunuch Solomon, restored the modesty of the camp, and maintained for a while the tranquillity of Africa. But the vices of the Byzantine court were felt in that distant province; the troops complained that they were neither paid nor relieved, and as soon as the public disorders were sufficiently mature, Stoza was again alive, in arms, and at the gates of Carthage. He fell in a single combat, but he smiled in the agonies of death, when he was informed that his own javelin had reached the heart of his antagonist. [1001] The example of Stoza, and the assurance that a fortunate soldier had been the first king, encouraged the ambition of Gontharis, and he promised, by a private treaty, to divide Africa with the Moors, if, with their dangerous aid, he should ascend the throne of Carthage. The feeble Areobindus, unskilled in the affairs of peace and war, was raised, by his marriage with the niece of Justinian, to the office of exarch. He was suddenly oppressed by a sedition of the guards, and his abject supplications, which provoked the contempt, could not move the pity, of the inexorable tyrant. After a reign of thirty days, Gontharis himself was stabbed at a banquet by the hand of Artaban; [1002] and it is singular enough, that an Armenian prince, of the royal family of Arsaces, should reestablish at Carthage the authority of the Roman empire. In the conspiracy which unsheathed the dagger of Brutus against the life of Caesar, every circumstance is curious and important to the eyes of posterity; but the guilt or merit of these loyal or rebellious

assassins could interest only the contemporaries of Procopius, who, by their hopes and fears, their friendship or resentment, were personally engaged in the revolutions of Africa. [2]

[Footnote 1: For the troubles of Africa, I neither have nor desire another guide than Procopius, whose eye contemplated the image, and whose ear collected the reports, of the memorable events of his own times. In the second book of the Vandalic war he relates the revolt of Stoza, (c. 14--24,) the return of Belisarius, (c. 15,) the victory of Germanus, (c. 16, 17, 18,) the second administration of Solomon, (c. 19, 20, 21,) the government of Sergius, (c. 22, 23,) of Areobindus, (c. 24,) the tyranny and death of Gontharis, (c. 25, 26, 27, 28;) nor can I discern any symptoms of flattery or malevolence in his various portraits.]

[Footnote 1001: Corippus gives a different account of the death of Stoza; he was transfixed by an arrow from the hand of John, (not the hero of his poem) who broke desperately through the victorious troops of the enemy. Stoza repented, says the poet, of his treasonous rebellion, and anticipated--another Cataline--eternal torments as his punishment.

Reddam, improba, poenas Quas merui.

Furiis socius Catilina cruentis Exagitatus adest.

Video jam Tartara, fundo Flammarumque globos, et clara incendia volvi.

--Johannidos, book iv. line 211.

All the other authorities confirm Gibbon's account of the death of John by the hand of Stoza. This poem of Corippus, unknown to Gibbon, was first published by Mazzuchelli during the present century, and is reprinted in the new edition of the Byzantine writers.--M]

[Footnote 1002: This murder was prompted to the Armenian (according to Corippus) by Athanasius, (then praefect of Africa.)

Hunc placidus cana gravitate coegit

Inumitera mactare virum.

--Corripus, vol. iv. p. 237--M.]

[Footnote 2: Yet I must not refuse him the merit of painting, in lively colors, the murder of Gontharis. One of the assassins uttered a sentiment not unworthy of a Roman patriot: "If I fail," said Artasires, "in the first stroke, kill me on the spot, lest the rack should extort a discovery of my accomplices."]

That country was rapidly sinking into the state of barbarism from whence it had been raised by the Phoenician colonies and Roman laws; and every step of intestine discord was marked by some deplorable victory of savage man over civilized society. The Moors, [3] though ignorant of justice, were impatient of oppression: their vagrant life and boundless wilderness disappointed the arms, and eluded the chains, of a conqueror; and experience had shown, that neither oaths nor obligations could secure the fidelity of their attachment. The victory of Mount Auras had

awed them into momentary submission; but if they respected the character of Solomon, they hated and despised the pride and luxury of his two nephews, Cyrus and Sergius, on whom their uncle had imprudently bestowed the provincial governments of Tripoli and Pentapolis. A Moorish tribe encamped under the walls of Leptis, to renew their alliance, and receive from the governor the customary gifts. Fourscore of their deputies were introduced as friends into the city; but on the dark suspicion of a conspiracy, they were massacred at the table of Sergius, and the clamor of arms and revenge was reechoed through the valleys of Mount Atlas from both the Syrtes to the Atlantic Ocean. A personal injury, the unjust execution or murder of his brother, rendered Antalas the enemy of the Romans. The defeat of the Vandals had formerly signalized his valor; the rudiments of justice and prudence were still more conspicuous in a Moor; and while he laid Adrumetum in ashes, he calmly admonished the emperor that the peace of Africa might be secured by the recall of Solomon and his unworthy nephews. The exarch led forth his troops from Carthage: but, at the distance of six days' journey, in the neighborhood of Tebeste, [4] he was astonished by the superior numbers and fierce aspect of the Barbarians. He proposed a treaty; solicited a reconciliation; and offered to bind himself by the most solemn oaths. "By what oaths can he bind himself?" interrupted the indignant Moors. "Will he swear by the Gospels, the divine books of the Christians? It was on those books that the faith of his nephew Sergius was pledged to eighty of our innocent and unfortunate brethren. Before we trust them a second time, let us try their efficacy in the chastisement of perjury and the vindication of their own honor." Their honor was vindicated in the field of Tebeste, by

the death of Solomon, and the total loss of his army. [411] The arrival of fresh troops and more skilful commanders soon checked the insolence of the Moors: seventeen of their princes were slain in the same battle; and the doubtful and transient submission of their tribes was celebrated with lavish applause by the people of Constantinople. Successive inroads had reduced the province of Africa to one third of the measure of Italy; yet the Roman emperors continued to reign above a century over Carthage and the fruitful coast of the Mediterranean. But the victories and the losses of Justinian were alike pernicious to mankind; and such was the desolation of Africa, that in many parts a stranger might wander whole days without meeting the face either of a friend or an enemy. The nation of the Vandals had disappeared: they once amounted to a hundred and sixty thousand warriors, without including the children, the women, or the slaves. Their numbers were infinitely surpassed by the number of the Moorish families extirpated in a relentless war; and the same destruction was retaliated on the Romans and their allies, who perished by the climate, their mutual quarrels, and the rage of the Barbarians. When Procopius first landed, he admired the populousness of the cities and country, strenuously exercised in the labors of commerce and agriculture. In less than twenty years, that busy scene was converted into a silent solitude; the wealthy citizens escaped to Sicily and Constantinople; and the secret historian has confidently affirmed, that five millions of Africans were consumed by the wars and government of the emperor Justinian. [5]

[Footnote 3: The Moorish wars are occasionally introduced into the



narrative of Procopius, (Vandal. 1. ii. c. 19--23, 25, 27, 28. Gothic. 1. iv. c. 17;) and Theophanes adds some prosperous and adverse events in the last years of Justinian.]

[Footnote 4: Now Tibesh, in the kingdom of Algiers. It is watered by a river, the Sujerass, which falls into the Mejerda, (Bagradas.) Tibesh is still remarkable for its walls of large stones, (like the Coliseum of Rome,) a fountain, and a grove of walnut-trees: the country is fruitful, and the neighboring Bereberes are warlike. It appears from an inscription, that, under the reign of Adrian, the road from Carthage to Tebeste was constructed by the third legion, (Marmol, Description de l'Afrique, tom. ii. p. 442, 443. Shaw's Travels, p. 64, 65, 66.)]

[Footnote 411: Corripus (Johannidos lib. iii. 417--441) describes the defeat and death of Solomon.--M.]

[Footnote 5: Procopius, Anecdot. c. 18. The series of the African history at tests this melancholy truth.]

The jealousy of the Byzantine court had not permitted Belisarius to achieve the conquest of Italy; and his abrupt departure revived the courage of the Goths, [6] who respected his genius, his virtue, and even the laudable motive which had urged the servant of Justinian to deceive and reject them. They had lost their king, (an inconsiderable loss,) their capital, their treasures, the provinces from Sicily to the Alps, and the military force of two hundred thousand Barbarians, magnificently

equipped with horses and arms. Yet all was not lost, as long as Pavia was defended by one thousand Goths, inspired by a sense of honor, the love of freedom, and the memory of their past greatness. The supreme command was unanimously offered to the brave Uraias; and it was in his eyes alone that the disgrace of his uncle Vitiges could appear as a reason of exclusion. His voice inclined the election in favor of Hildibald, whose personal merit was recommended by the vain hope that his kinsman Theudes, the Spanish monarch, would support the common interest of the Gothic nation. The success of his arms in Liguria and Venetia seemed to justify their choice; but he soon declared to the world that he was incapable of forgiving or commanding his benefactor. The consort of Hildibald was deeply wounded by the beauty, the riches, and the pride, of the wife of Uraias; and the death of that virtuous patriot excited the indignation of a free people. A bold assassin executed their sentence by striking off the head of Hildibald in the midst of a banquet; the Rugians, a foreign tribe, assumed the privilege of election: and Totila, [611] the nephew of the late king, was tempted, by revenge, to deliver himself and the garrison of Trevigo into the hands of the Romans.

But the gallant and accomplished youth was easily persuaded to prefer the Gothic throne before the service of Justinian; and as soon as the palace of Pavia had been purified from the Rugian usurper, he reviewed the national force of five thousand soldiers, and generously undertook the restoration of the kingdom of Italy.

[Footnote 6: In the second (c. 30) and third books, (c. 1--40,) Procopius continues the history of the Gothic war from the fifth to the fifteenth year of Justinian. As the events are less interesting than in the former period, he allots only half the space to double the time. Jornandes, and the Chronicle of Marcellinus, afford some collateral hints Sigonius, Pagi, Muratori, Mascou, and De Buat, are useful, and have been used.]

[Footnote 611: His real name, as appears by medals, was Baduilla, or Badiula. Totila signifies immortal: tod (in German) is death. Todilas, deathless. Compare St Martin, vol. ix. p. 37.--M.]

The successors of Belisarius, eleven generals of equal rank, neglected to crush the feeble and disunited Goths, till they were roused to action by the progress of Totila and the reproaches of Justinian. The gates of Verona were secretly opened to Artabazus, at the head of one hundred Persians in the service of the empire. The Goths fled from the city. At the distance of sixty furlongs the Roman generals halted to regulate the division of the spoil. While they disputed, the enemy discovered the real number of the victors: the Persians were instantly overpowered, and it was by leaping from the wall that Artabazus preserved a life which he lost in a few days by the lance of a Barbarian, who had defied him to single combat. Twenty thousand Romans encountered the forces of Totila, near Faenza, and on the hills of Mugello, of the Florentine territory. The ardor of freedmen, who fought to regain their country, was opposed to the languid temper of mercenary troops, who were even destitute

of the merits of strong and well-disciplined servitude. On the first attack, they abandoned their ensigns, threw down their arms, and dispersed on all sides with an active speed, which abated the loss, whilst it aggravated the shame, of their defeat. The king of the Goths, who blushed for the baseness of his enemies, pursued with rapid steps the path of honor and victory. Totila passed the Po, [6112] traversed the Apennine, suspended the important conquest of Ravenna, Florence, and Rome, and marched through the heart of Italy, to form the siege or rather the blockade, of Naples. The Roman chiefs, imprisoned in their respective cities, and accusing each other of the common disgrace, did not presume to disturb his enterprise. But the emperor, alarmed by the distress and danger of his Italian conquests, despatched to the relief of Naples a fleet of galleys and a body of Thracian and Armenian soldiers. They landed in Sicily, which yielded its copious stores of provisions; but the delays of the new commander, an unwarlike magistrate, protracted the sufferings of the besieged; and the succors, which he dropped with a timid and tardy hand, were successively intercepted by the armed vessels stationed by Totila in the Bay of Naples. The principal officer of the Romans was dragged, with a rope round his neck, to the foot of the wall, from whence, with a trembling voice, he exhorted the citizens to implore, like himself, the mercy of the conqueror. They requested a truce, with a promise of surrendering the city, if no effectual relief should appear at the end of thirty days. Instead of one month, the audacious Barbarian granted them three, in the just confidence that famine would anticipate the term of their capitulation. After the reduction of Naples and Cumae, the provinces

of Lucania, Apulia, and Calabria, submitted to the king of the Goths. Totila led his army to the gates of Rome, pitched his camp at Tibur, or Tivoli, within twenty miles of the capital, and calmly exhorted the senate and people to compare the tyranny of the Greeks with the blessings of the Gothic reign.

[Footnote 6112: This is not quite correct: he had crossed the Po before the battle of Faenza.--M.]

The rapid success of Totila may be partly ascribed to the revolution which three years' experience had produced in the sentiments of the Italians. At the command, or at least in the name, of a Catholic emperor, the pope, [7] their spiritual father, had been torn from the Roman church, and either starved or murdered on a desolate island. [8] The virtues of Belisarius were replaced by the various or uniform vices of eleven chiefs, at Rome, Ravenna, Florence, Perugia, Spoleto, &c., who abused their authority for the indulgence of lust or avarice. The improvement of the revenue was committed to Alexander, a subtle scribe, long practised in the fraud and oppression of the Byzantine schools, and whose name of Psallicion, the scissors, [9] was drawn from the dexterous artifice with which he reduced the size without defacing the figure, of the gold coin. Instead of expecting the restoration of peace and industry, he imposed a heavy assessment on the fortunes of the Italians. Yet his present or future demands were less odious than a prosecution of arbitrary rigor against the persons and property of all those who, under the Gothic kings, had been concerned in the receipt and

expenditure of the public money. The subjects of Justinian, who escaped these partial vexations, were oppressed by the irregular maintenance of the soldiers, whom Alexander defrauded and despised; and their hasty sallies in quest of wealth, or subsistence, provoked the inhabitants of the country to await or implore their deliverance from the virtues of a Barbarian. Totila [10] was chaste and temperate; and none were deceived, either friends or enemies, who depended on his faith or his clemency. To the husbandmen of Italy the Gothic king issued a welcome proclamation, enjoining them to pursue their important labors, and to rest assured, that, on the payment of the ordinary taxes, they should be defended by his valor and discipline from the injuries of war. The strong towns he successively attacked; and as soon as they had yielded to his arms, he demolished the fortifications, to save the people from the calamities of a future siege, to deprive the Romans of the arts of defence, and to decide the tedious quarrel of the two nations, by an equal and honorable conflict in the field of battle. The Roman captives and deserters were tempted to enlist in the service of a liberal and courteous adversary; the slaves were attracted by the firm and faithful promise, that they should never be delivered to their masters; and from the thousand warriors of Pavia, a new people, under the same appellation of Goths, was insensibly formed in the camp of Totila. He sincerely accomplished the articles of capitulation, without seeking or accepting any sinister advantage from ambiguous expressions or unforeseen events: the garrison of Naples had stipulated that they should be transported by sea; the obstinacy of the winds prevented their voyage, but they were generously supplied with horses, provisions, and a safe-conduct to the gates of

Rome. The wives of the senators, who had been surprised in the villas of Campania, were restored, without a ransom, to their husbands; the violation of female chastity was inexorably chastised with death; and in the salutary regulation of the edict of the famished Neapolitans, the conqueror assumed the office of a humane and attentive physician. The virtues of Totila are equally laudable, whether they proceeded from true policy, religious principle, or the instinct of humanity: he often harangued his troops; and it was his constant theme, that national vice and ruin are inseparably connected; that victory is the fruit of moral as well as military virtue; and that the prince, and even the people, are responsible for the crimes which they neglect to punish. [Footnote 7: Sylverius, bishop of Rome, was first transported to Patara, in Lycia, and at length starved (*sub eorum custodia inedia confectus*) in the Isle of Palmaria, A.D. 538, June 20, (*Liberat. in Breviar. c. 22. Anastasius, in Sylverio. Baronius, A.D. 540, No. 2, 3. Pagi, in Vit. Pont. tom. i. p. 285, 286.*) Procopius (*Anecdot. c. 1*) accuses only the empress and Antonina.]

[Footnote 8: Palmaria, a small island, opposite to Terracina and the coast of the Volsci, (*Cluver. Ital. Antiq. l. iii. c. 7, p. 1014.*)]

[Footnote 9: As the Logothete Alexander, and most of his civil and military colleagues, were either disgraced or despised, the ink of the Anecdotes (*c. 4, 5, 18*) is scarcely blacker than that of the Gothic History (*l. iii. c. 1, 3, 4, 9, 20, 21, &c.*)]

[Footnote 10: Procopius (l. iii. c. 2, 8, &c.) does ample and willing justice to the merit of Totila. The Roman historians, from Sallust and Tacitus were happy to forget the vices of their countrymen in the contemplation of Barbaric virtue.]

The return of Belisarius to save the country which he had subdued, was pressed with equal vehemence by his friends and enemies; and the Gothic war was imposed as a trust or an exile on the veteran commander. A hero on the banks of the Euphrates, a slave in the palace of Constantinople, he accepted with reluctance the painful task of supporting his own reputation, and retrieving the faults of his successors. The sea was open to the Romans: the ships and soldiers were assembled at Salona, near the palace of Diocletian: he refreshed and reviewed his troops at Pola in Istria, coasted round the head of the Adriatic, entered the port of Ravenna, and despatched orders rather than supplies to the subordinate cities. His first public oration was addressed to the Goths and Romans, in the name of the emperor, who had suspended for a while the conquest of Persia, and listened to the prayers of his Italian subjects. He gently touched on the causes and the authors of the recent disasters; striving to remove the fear of punishment for the past, and the hope of impunity for the future, and laboring, with more zeal than success, to unite all the members of his government in a firm league of affection and obedience. Justinian, his gracious master, was inclined to pardon and reward; and it was their interest, as well as duty, to reclaim their deluded brethren, who had been seduced by the arts of the usurper. Not a man was tempted to desert the standard of the Gothic



king. Belisarius soon discovered, that he was sent to remain the idle and impotent spectator of the glory of a young Barbarian; and his own epistle exhibits a genuine and lively picture of the distress of a noble mind. "Most excellent prince, we are arrived in Italy, destitute of all the necessary implements of war, men, horses, arms, and money. In our late circuit through the villages of Thrace and Illyricum, we have collected, with extreme difficulty, about four thousand recruits, naked, and unskilled in the use of weapons and the exercises of the camp. The soldiers already stationed in the province are discontented, fearful, and dismayed; at the sound of an enemy, they dismiss their horses, and cast their arms on the ground. No taxes can be raised, since Italy is in the hands of the Barbarians; the failure of payment has deprived us of the right of command, or even of admonition. Be assured, dread Sir, that the greater part of your troops have already deserted to the Goths. If the war could be achieved by the presence of Belisarius alone, your wishes are satisfied; Belisarius is in the midst of Italy. But if you desire to conquer, far other preparations are requisite: without a military force, the title of general is an empty name. It would be expedient to restore to my service my own veteran and domestic guards. Before I can take the field, I must receive an adequate supply of light and heavy armed troops; and it is only with ready money that you can procure the indispensable aid of a powerful body of the cavalry of the Huns." [11] An officer in whom Belisarius confided was sent from Ravenna to hasten and conduct the succors; but the message was neglected, and the messenger was detained at Constantinople by an advantageous marriage. After his patience had been exhausted by delay and

disappointment, the Roman general repassed the Adriatic, and expected at Dyrrachium the arrival of the troops, which were slowly assembled among the subjects and allies of the empire. His powers were still inadequate to the deliverance of Rome, which was closely besieged by the Gothic king. The Appian way, a march of forty days, was covered by the Barbarians; and as the prudence of Belisarius declined a battle, he preferred the safe and speedy navigation of five days from the coast of Epirus to the mouth of the Tyber.

[Footnote 11: Procopius, l. iii. c. 12. The soul of a hero is deeply impressed on the letter; nor can we confound such genuine and original acts with the elaborate and often empty speeches of the Byzantine historians]

After reducing, by force, or treaty, the towns of inferior note in the midland provinces of Italy, Totila proceeded, not to assault, but to encompass and starve, the ancient capital. Rome was afflicted by the avarice, and guarded by the valor, of Bessas, a veteran chief of Gothic extraction, who filled, with a garrison of three thousand soldiers, the spacious circle of her venerable walls. From the distress of the people he extracted a profitable trade, and secretly rejoiced in the continuance of the siege. It was for his use that the granaries had been replenished: the charity of Pope Vigilius had purchased and embarked an ample supply of Sicilian corn; but the vessels which escaped the Barbarians were seized by a rapacious governor, who imparted a scanty sustenance to the soldiers, and sold the remainder to the wealthy

Romans. The medimnus, or fifth part of the quarter of wheat, was exchanged for seven pieces of gold; fifty pieces were given for an ox, a rare and accidental prize; the progress of famine enhanced this exorbitant value, and the mercenaries were tempted to deprive themselves of the allowance which was scarcely sufficient for the support of life. A tasteless and unwholesome mixture, in which the bran thrice exceeded the quantity of flour, appeased the hunger of the poor; they were gradually reduced to feed on dead horses, dogs, cats, and mice, and eagerly to snatch the grass, and even the nettles, which grew among the ruins of the city. A crowd of spectres, pale and emaciated, their bodies oppressed with disease, and their minds with despair, surrounded the palace of the governor, urged, with unavailing truth, that it was the duty of a master to maintain his slaves, and humbly requested that he would provide for their subsistence, to permit their flight, or command their immediate execution. Bessas replied, with unfeeling tranquillity, that it was impossible to feed, unsafe to dismiss, and unlawful to kill, the subjects of the emperor. Yet the example of a private citizen might have shown his countrymen that a tyrant cannot withhold the privilege of death. Pierced by the cries of five children, who vainly called on their father for bread, he ordered them to follow his steps, advanced with calm and silent despair to one of the bridges of the Tyber, and, covering his face, threw himself headlong into the stream, in the presence of his family and the Roman people. To the rich and pusillanimous, Bessas [12] sold the permission of departure; but the greatest part of the fugitives expired on the public highways, or were intercepted by the flying parties of Barbarians. In the mean while, the

artful governor soothed the discontent, and revived the hopes of the Romans, by the vague reports of the fleets and armies which were hastening to their relief from the extremities of the East. They derived more rational comfort from the assurance that Belisarius had landed at the port; and, without numbering his forces, they firmly relied on the humanity, the courage, and the skill of their great deliverer.

[Footnote 12: The avarice of Bessas is not dissembled by Procopius, (l. iii. c. 17, 20.) He expiated the loss of Rome by the glorious conquest of Petraea, (Goth. l. iv. c. 12;) but the same vices followed him from the Tyber to the Phasis, (c. 13;) and the historian is equally true to the merits and defects of his character. The chastisement which the author of the romance of Belisaire has inflicted on the oppressor of Rome is more agreeable to justice than to history.]