

Chapter LVI: The Saracens, The Franks And The Normans.--Part I.

The Saracens, Franks, And Greeks, In Italy.--First  
Adventures And Settlement Of The Normans.--Character And  
Conquest Of Robert Guiscard, Duke Of Apulia--Deliverance Of  
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Emperors Of The East And West.--Roger, King Of Sicily,  
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Wars Of The Greeks And Normans.--Extinction Of The Normans.

The three great nations of the world, the Greeks, the Saracens, and the Franks, encountered each other on the theatre of Italy. The southern provinces, which now compose the kingdom of Naples, were subject, for the most part, to the Lombard dukes and princes of Beneventum; so powerful in war, that they checked for a moment the genius of Charlemagne; so liberal in peace, that they maintained in their capital an academy of thirty-two philosophers and grammarians. The division of this flourishing state produced the rival principalities of Benevento, Salerno, and Capua; and the thoughtless ambition or revenge of the competitors invited the Saracens to the ruin of their common inheritance. During a calamitous period of two hundred years, Italy was exposed to a repetition of wounds, which the invaders were not capable of healing by the union and tranquility of a perfect conquest. Their frequent and almost annual squadrons issued from the port of Palermo, and were entertained with too much indulgence by the Christians of Naples: the more formidable fleets were prepared on the African coast;

and even the Arabs of Andalusia were sometimes tempted to assist or oppose the Moslems of an adverse sect. In the revolution of human events, a new ambushade was concealed in the Caudine Forks, the fields of Cannæ were bedewed a second time with the blood of the Africans, and the sovereign of Rome again attacked or defended the walls of Capua and Tarentum. A colony of Saracens had been planted at Bari, which commands the entrance of the Adriatic Gulf; and their impartial depredations provoked the resentment, and conciliated the union of the two emperors. An offensive alliance was concluded between Basil the Macedonian, the first of his race, and Lewis the great-grandson of Charlemagne; and each party supplied the deficiencies of his associate. It would have been imprudent in the Byzantine monarch to transport his stationary troops of Asia to an Italian campaign; and the Latin arms would have been insufficient if his superior navy had not occupied the mouth of the Gulf. The fortress of Bari was invested by the infantry of the Franks, and by the cavalry and galleys of the Greeks; and, after a defence of four years, the Arabian emir submitted to the clemency of Lewis, who commanded in person the operations of the siege. This important conquest had been achieved by the concord of the East and West; but their recent amity was soon imbittered by the mutual complaints of jealousy and pride. The Greeks assumed as their own the merit of the conquest and the pomp of the triumph; extolled the greatness of their powers, and affected to deride the intemperance and sloth of the handful of Barbarians who appeared under the banners of the Carlovingian prince. His reply is expressed with the eloquence of indignation and truth: "We confess the magnitude of your preparation," says the great-grandson of

Charlemagne. "Your armies were indeed as numerous as a cloud of summer locusts, who darken the day, flap their wings, and, after a short flight, tumble weary and breathless to the ground. Like them, ye sunk after a feeble effort; ye were vanquished by your own cowardice; and withdrew from the scene of action to injure and despoil our Christian subjects of the Slavonian coast. We were few in number, and why were we few? Because, after a tedious expectation of your arrival, I had dismissed my host, and retained only a chosen band of warriors to continue the blockade of the city. If they indulged their hospitable feasts in the face of danger and death, did these feasts abate the vigor of their enterprise? Is it by your fasting that the walls of Bari have been overturned? Did not these valiant Franks, diminished as they were by languor and fatigue, intercept and vanish the three most powerful emirs of the Saracens? and did not their defeat precipitate the fall of the city? Bari is now fallen; Tarentum trembles; Calabria will be delivered; and, if we command the sea, the Island of Sicily may be rescued from the hands of the infidels. My brother," accelerate (a name most offensive to the vanity of the Greek,) "accelerate your naval succors, respect your allies, and distrust your flatterers."

These lofty hopes were soon extinguished by the death of Lewis, and the decay of the Carolingian house; and whoever might deserve the honor, the Greek emperors, Basil, and his son Leo, secured the advantage, of the reduction of Bari The Italians of Apulia and Calabria were persuaded or compelled to acknowledge their supremacy, and an ideal line from Mount Garganus to the Bay of Salerno, leaves the far greater part of the

kingdom of Naples under the dominion of the Eastern empire. Beyond that line, the dukes or republics of Amalfi and Naples, who had never forfeited their voluntary allegiance, rejoiced in the neighborhood of their lawful sovereign; and Amalfi was enriched by supplying Europe with the produce and manufactures of Asia. But the Lombard princes of Benevento, Salerno, and Capua, were reluctantly torn from the communion of the Latin world, and too often violated their oaths of servitude and tribute. The city of Bari rose to dignity and wealth, as the metropolis of the new theme or province of Lombardy: the title of patrician, and afterwards the singular name of Catapan, was assigned to the supreme governor; and the policy both of the church and state was modelled in exact subordination to the throne of Constantinople. As long as the sceptre was disputed by the princes of Italy, their efforts were feeble and adverse; and the Greeks resisted or eluded the forces of Germany, which descended from the Alps under the Imperial standard of the Othos. The first and greatest of those Saxon princes was compelled to relinquish the siege of Bari: the second, after the loss of his stoutest bishops and barons, escaped with honor from the bloody field of Crotona. On that day the scale of war was turned against the Franks by the valor of the Saracens. These corsairs had indeed been driven by the Byzantine fleets from the fortresses and coasts of Italy; but a sense of interest was more prevalent than superstition or resentment, and the caliph of Egypt had transported forty thousand Moslems to the aid of his Christian ally. The successors of Basil amused themselves with the belief, that the conquest of Lombardy had been achieved, and was still preserved by the justice of their laws, the virtues of their ministers, and the

gratitude of a people whom they had rescued from anarchy and oppression. A series of rebellions might dart a ray of truth into the palace of Constantinople; and the illusions of flattery were dispelled by the easy and rapid success of the Norman adventurers.

The revolution of human affairs had produced in Apulia and Calabria a melancholy contrast between the age of Pythagoras and the tenth century of the Christian æra. At the former period, the coast of Great Greece (as it was then styled) was planted with free and opulent cities: these cities were peopled with soldiers, artists, and philosophers; and the military strength of Tarentum; Sybaris, or Crotona, was not inferior to that of a powerful kingdom. At the second æra, these once flourishing provinces were clouded with ignorance impoverished by tyranny, and depopulated by Barbarian war nor can we severely accuse the exaggeration of a contemporary, that a fair and ample district was reduced to the same desolation which had covered the earth after the general deluge. Among the hostilities of the Arabs, the Franks, and the Greeks, in the southern Italy, I shall select two or three anecdotes expressive of their national manners. 1. It was the amusement of the Saracens to profane, as well as to pillage, the monasteries and churches. At the siege of Salerno, a Mussulman chief spread his couch on the communion-table, and on that altar sacrificed each night the virginity of a Christian nun. As he wrestled with a reluctant maid, a beam in the roof was accidentally or dexterously thrown down on his head; and the death of the lustful emir was imputed to the wrath of Christ, which was at length awakened to the defence of his faithful spouse. 2.

The Saracens besieged the cities of Beneventum and Capua: after a vain appeal to the successors of Charlemagne, the Lombards implored the clemency and aid of the Greek emperor. A fearless citizen dropped from the walls, passed the intrenchments, accomplished his commission, and fell into the hands of the Barbarians as he was returning with the welcome news. They commanded him to assist their enterprise, and deceive his countrymen, with the assurance that wealth and honors should be the reward of his falsehood, and that his sincerity would be punished with immediate death. He affected to yield, but as soon as he was conducted within hearing of the Christians on the rampart, "Friends and brethren," he cried with a loud voice, "be bold and patient, maintain the city; your sovereign is informed of your distress, and your deliverers are at hand. I know my doom, and commit my wife and children to your gratitude." The rage of the Arabs confirmed his evidence; and the self-devoted patriot was transpierced with a hundred spears. He deserves to live in the memory of the virtuous, but the repetition of the same story in ancient and modern times, may sprinkle some doubts on the reality of this generous deed. 3. The recital of a third incident may provoke a smile amidst the horrors of war. Theobald, marquis of Camerino and Spoleto, supported the rebels of Beneventum; and his wanton cruelty was not incompatible in that age with the character of a hero. His captives of the Greek nation or party were castrated without mercy, and the outrage was aggravated by a cruel jest, that he wished to present the emperor with a supply of eunuchs, the most precious ornaments of the Byzantine court. The garrison of a castle had been defeated in a sally, and the prisoners were sentenced to the customary operation. But the

sacrifice was disturbed by the intrusion of a frantic female, who, with bleeding cheeks dishevelled hair, and importunate clamors, compelled the marquis to listen to her complaint. "Is it thus," she cried, "ye magnanimous heroes, that ye wage war against women, against women who have never injured ye, and whose only arms are the distaff and the loom?" Theobald denied the charge, and protested that, since the Amazons, he had never heard of a female war. "And how," she furiously exclaimed, "can you attack us more directly, how can you wound us in a more vital part, than by robbing our husbands of what we most dearly cherish, the source of our joys, and the hope of our posterity? The plunder of our flocks and herds I have endured without a murmur, but this fatal injury, this irreparable loss, subdues my patience, and calls aloud on the justice of heaven and earth." A general laugh applauded her eloquence; the savage Franks, inaccessible to pity, were moved by her ridiculous, yet rational despair; and with the deliverance of the captives, she obtained the restitution of her effects. As she returned in triumph to the castle, she was overtaken by a messenger, to inquire, in the name of Theobald, what punishment should be inflicted on her husband, were he again taken in arms. "Should such," she answered without hesitation, "be his guilt and misfortune, he has eyes, and a nose, and hands, and feet. These are his own, and these he may deserve to forfeit by his personal offences. But let my lord be pleased to spare what his little handmaid presumes to claim as her peculiar and lawful property."

The establishment of the Normans in the kingdoms of Naples and Sicily

is an event most romantic in its origin, and in its consequences most important both to Italy and the Eastern empire. The broken provinces of the Greeks, Lombards, and Saracens, were exposed to every invader, and every sea and land were invaded by the adventurous spirit of the Scandinavian pirates. After a long indulgence of rapine and slaughter, a fair and ample territory was accepted, occupied, and named, by the Normans of France: they renounced their gods for the God of the Christians; and the dukes of Normandy acknowledged themselves the vassals of the successors of Charlemagne and Capet. The savage fierceness which they had brought from the snowy mountains of Norway was refined, without being corrupted, in a warmer climate; the companions of Rollo insensibly mingled with the natives; they imbibed the manners, language, and gallantry, of the French nation; and in a martial age, the Normans might claim the palm of valor and glorious achievements. Of the fashionable superstitions, they embraced with ardor the pilgrimages of Rome, Italy, and the Holy Land. In this active devotion, the minds and bodies were invigorated by exercise: danger was the incentive, novelty the recompense; and the prospect of the world was decorated by wonder, credulity, and ambitious hope. They confederated for their mutual defence; and the robbers of the Alps, who had been allured by the garb of a pilgrim, were often chastised by the arm of a warrior. In one of these pious visits to the cavern of Mount Garganus in Apulia, which had been sanctified by the apparition of the archangel Michael, they were accosted by a stranger in the Greek habit, but who soon revealed himself as a rebel, a fugitive, and a mortal foe of the Greek empire. His name



was Melo; a noble citizen of Bari, who, after an unsuccessful revolt, was compelled to seek new allies and avengers of his country. The bold appearance of the Normans revived his hopes and solicited his confidence: they listened to the complaints, and still more to the promises, of the patriot. The assurance of wealth demonstrated the justice of his cause; and they viewed, as the inheritance of the brave, the fruitful land which was oppressed by effeminate tyrants. On their return to Normandy, they kindled a spark of enterprise, and a small but intrepid band was freely associated for the deliverance of Apulia. They passed the Alps by separate roads, and in the disguise of pilgrims; but in the neighborhood of Rome they were saluted by the chief of Bari, who supplied the more indigent with arms and horses, and instantly led them to the field of action. In the first conflict, their valor prevailed; but in the second engagement they were overwhelmed by the numbers and military engines of the Greeks, and indignantly retreated with their faces to the enemy. The unfortunate Melo ended his life a suppliant at the court of Germany: his Norman followers, excluded from their native and their promised land, wandered among the hills and valleys of Italy, and earned their daily subsistence by the sword. To that formidable sword the princes of Capua, Beneventum, Salerno, and Naples, alternately appealed in their domestic quarrels; the superior spirit and discipline of the Normans gave victory to the side which they espoused; and their cautious policy observed the balance of power, lest the preponderance of any rival state should render their aid less important, and their service less profitable. Their first asylum was a strong camp in the depth of the marshes of Campania: but they were soon endowed by the

liberality of the duke of Naples with a more plentiful and permanent seat. Eight miles from his residence, as a bulwark against Capua, the town of Aversa was built and fortified for their use; and they enjoyed as their own the corn and fruits, the meadows and groves, of that fertile district. The report of their success attracted every year new swarms of pilgrims and soldiers: the poor were urged by necessity; the rich were excited by hope; and the brave and active spirits of Normandy were impatient of ease and ambitious of renown. The independent standard of Aversa afforded shelter and encouragement to the outlaws of the province, to every fugitive who had escaped from the injustice or justice of his superiors; and these foreign associates were quickly assimilated in manners and language to the Gallic colony. The first leader of the Normans was Count Rainulf; and, in the origin of society, preëminence of rank is the reward and the proof of superior merit.

Since the conquest of Sicily by the Arabs, the Grecian emperors had been anxious to regain that valuable possession; but their efforts, however strenuous, had been opposed by the distance and the sea. Their costly armaments, after a gleam of success, added new pages of calamity and disgrace to the Byzantine annals: twenty thousand of their best troops were lost in a single expedition; and the victorious Moslems derided the policy of a nation which intrusted eunuchs not only with the custody of their women, but with the command of their men. After a reign of two hundred years, the Saracens were ruined by their divisions. The emir disclaimed the authority of the king of Tunis; the people rose against the emir; the cities were usurped by the chiefs; each meaner rebel

was independent in his village or castle; and the weaker of two rival brothers implored the friendship of the Christians. In every service of danger the Normans were prompt and useful; and five hundred knights, or warriors on horseback, were enrolled by Arduin, the agent and interpreter of the Greeks, under the standard of Maniaces, governor of Lombardy. Before their landing, the brothers were reconciled; the union of Sicily and Africa was restored; and the island was guarded to the water's edge. The Normans led the van and the Arabs of Messina felt the valor of an untried foe. In a second action the emir of Syracuse was unhorsed and transpierced by the iron arm of William of Hauteville. In a third engagement, his intrepid companions discomfited the host of sixty thousand Saracens, and left the Greeks no more than the labor of the pursuit: a splendid victory; but of which the pen of the historian may divide the merit with the lance of the Normans. It is, however, true, that they essentially promoted the success of Maniaces, who reduced thirteen cities, and the greater part of Sicily, under the obedience of the emperor. But his military fame was sullied by ingratitude and tyranny. In the division of the spoils, the deserts of his brave auxiliaries were forgotten; and neither their avarice nor their pride could brook this injurious treatment. They complained by the mouth of their interpreter: their complaint was disregarded; their interpreter was scourged; the sufferings were his; the insult and resentment belonged to those whose sentiments he had delivered. Yet they dissembled till they had obtained, or stolen, a safe passage to the Italian continent: their brethren of Aversa sympathized in their indignation, and the province of Apulia was invaded as the forfeit of

the debt. Above twenty years after the first emigration, the Normans took the field with no more than seven hundred horse and five hundred foot; and after the recall of the Byzantine legions from the Sicilian war, their numbers are magnified to the amount of threescore thousand men. Their herald proposed the option of battle or retreat; "of battle," was the unanimous cry of the Normans; and one of their stoutest warriors, with a stroke of his fist, felled to the ground the horse of the Greek messenger. He was dismissed with a fresh horse; the insult was concealed from the Imperial troops; but in two successive battles they were more fatally instructed of the prowess of their adversaries. In the plains of Cannæ, the Asiatics fled before the adventurers of France; the duke of Lombardy was made prisoner; the Apulians acquiesced in a new dominion; and the four places of Bari, Otranto, Brundusium, and Tarentum, were alone saved in the shipwreck of the Grecian fortunes. From this æra we may date the establishment of the Norman power, which soon eclipsed the infant colony of Aversa. Twelve counts were chosen by the popular suffrage; and age, birth, and merit, were the motives of their choice. The tributes of their peculiar districts were appropriated to their use; and each count erected a fortress in the midst of his lands, and at the head of his vassals. In the centre of the province, the common habitation of Melphi was reserved as the metropolis and citadel of the republic; a house and separate quarter was allotted to each of the twelve counts: and the national concerns were regulated by this military senate. The first of his peers, their president and general, was entitled count of Apulia; and this dignity was conferred on William of the iron arm, who, in the language of the age, is styled a

lion in battle, a lamb in society, and an angel in council. The manners of his countrymen are fairly delineated by a contemporary and national historian. "The Normans," says Malaterra, "are a cunning and revengeful people; eloquence and dissimulation appear to be their hereditary qualities: they can stoop to flatter; but unless they are curbed by the restraint of law, they indulge the licentiousness of nature and passion. Their princes affect the praises of popular munificence; the people observe the medium, or rather blend the extremes, of avarice and prodigality; and in their eager thirst of wealth and dominion, they despise whatever they possess, and hope whatever they desire. Arms and horses, the luxury of dress, the exercises of hunting and hawking are the delight of the Normans; but, on pressing occasions, they can endure with incredible patience the inclemency of every climate, and the toil and absence of a military life."