

Chapter LXII: Greek Emperors Of Nice And Constantinople.--Part III.

I shall not, I trust, be accused of superstition; but I must remark that, even in this world, the natural order of events will sometimes afford the strong appearances of moral retribution. The first Palæologus had saved his empire by involving the kingdoms of the West in rebellion and blood; and from these scenes of discord uprose a generation of iron men, who assaulted and endangered the empire of his son. In modern times our debts and taxes are the secret poison which still corrodes the bosom of peace: but in the weak and disorderly government of the middle ages, it was agitated by the present evil of the disbanded armies. Too idle to work, too proud to beg, the mercenaries were accustomed to a life of rapine: they could rob with more dignity and effect under a banner and a chief; and the sovereign, to whom their service was useless, and their presence importunate, endeavored to discharge the torrent on some neighboring countries. After the peace of Sicily, many thousands of Genoese, Catalans, [47] &c., who had fought, by sea and land, under the standard of Anjou or Arragon, were blended into one nation by the resemblance of their manners and interest. They heard that the Greek provinces of Asia were invaded by the Turks: they resolved to share the harvest of pay and plunder: and Frederic king of Sicily most liberally contributed the means of their departure. In a warfare of twenty years, a ship, or a camp, was become their country; arms were their sole profession and property; valor was the only virtue which they knew; their women had imbibed the fearless temper of their lovers and husbands: it was reported, that, with a stroke of their broadsword, the

Catalans could cleave a horseman and a horse; and the report itself was a powerful weapon. Roger de Flor [477] was the most popular of their chiefs; and his personal merit overshadowed the dignity of his prouder rivals of Arragon. The offspring of a marriage between a German gentleman of the court of Frederic the Second and a damsel of Brindisi, Roger was successively a templar, an apostate, a pirate, and at length the richest and most powerful admiral of the Mediterranean. He sailed from Messina to Constantinople, with eighteen galleys, four great ships, and eight thousand adventurers; [478] and his previous treaty was faithfully accomplished by Andronicus the elder, who accepted with joy and terror this formidable succor. A palace was allotted for his reception, and a niece of the emperor was given in marriage to the valiant stranger, who was immediately created great duke or admiral of Romania. After a decent repose, he transported his troops over the Propontis, and boldly led them against the Turks: in two bloody battles thirty thousand of the Moslems were slain: he raised the siege of Philadelphia, and deserved the name of the deliverer of Asia. But after a short season of prosperity, the cloud of slavery and ruin again burst on that unhappy province. The inhabitants escaped (says a Greek historian) from the smoke into the flames; and the hostility of the Turks was less pernicious than the friendship of the Catalans. [479] The lives and fortunes which they had rescued they considered as their own: the willing or reluctant maid was saved from the race of circumcision for the embraces of a Christian soldier: the exaction of fines and supplies was enforced by licentious rapine and arbitrary executions; and, on the resistance of Magnesia, the great duke besieged a city

of the Roman empire. [48] These disorders he excused by the wrongs and passions of a victorious army; nor would his own authority or person have been safe, had he dared to punish his faithful followers, who were defrauded of the just and covenanted price of their services. The threats and complaints of Andronicus disclosed the nakedness of the empire. His golden bull had invited no more than five hundred horse and a thousand foot soldiers; yet the crowds of volunteers, who migrated to the East, had been enlisted and fed by his spontaneous bounty. While his bravest allies were content with three byzants or pieces of gold, for their monthly pay, an ounce, or even two ounces, of gold were assigned to the Catalans, whose annual pension would thus amount to near a hundred pounds sterling: one of their chiefs had modestly rated at three hundred thousand crowns the value of his future merits; and above a million had been issued from the treasury for the maintenance of these costly mercenaries. A cruel tax had been imposed on the corn of the husbandman: one third was retrenched from the salaries of the public officers; and the standard of the coin was so shamefully debased, that of the four-and-twenty parts only five were of pure gold. [49] At the summons of the emperor, Roger evacuated a province which no longer supplied the materials of rapine; [496] but he refused to disperse his troops; and while his style was respectful, his conduct was independent and hostile. He protested, that if the emperor should march against him, he would advance forty paces to kiss the ground before him; but in rising from this prostrate attitude Roger had a life and sword at the service of his friends. The great duke of Romania condescended to accept the title and ornaments of Cæsar; but he rejected the new proposal of

the government of Asia with a subsidy of corn and money, [497] on condition that he should reduce his troops to the harmless number of three thousand men. Assassination is the last resource of cowards. The Cæsar was tempted to visit the royal residence of Adrianople; in the apartment, and before the eyes, of the empress he was stabbed by the Alani guards; and though the deed was imputed to their private revenge, [498] his countrymen, who dwelt at Constantinople in the security of peace, were involved in the same proscription by the prince or people. The loss of their leader intimidated the crowd of adventurers, who hoisted the sails of flight, and were soon scattered round the coasts of the Mediterranean. But a veteran band of fifteen hundred Catalans, or French, stood firm in the strong fortress of Gallipoli on the Hellespont, displayed the banners of Arragon, and offered to revenge and justify their chief, by an equal combat of ten or a hundred warriors. Instead of accepting this bold defiance, the emperor Michael, the son and colleague of Andronicus, resolved to oppress them with the weight of multitudes: every nerve was strained to form an army of thirteen thousand horse and thirty thousand foot; and the Propontis was covered with the ships of the Greeks and Genoese. In two battles by sea and land, these mighty forces were encountered and overthrown by the despair and discipline of the Catalans: the young emperor fled to the palace; and an insufficient guard of light-horse was left for the protection of the open country. Victory renewed the hopes and numbers of the adventures: every nation was blended under the name and standard of the great company; and three thousand Turkish proselytes deserted from the Imperial service to join this military association. In the possession of

Gallipoli, [499] the Catalans intercepted the trade of Constantinople and the Black Sea, while they spread their devastation on either side of the Hellespont over the confines of Europe and Asia. To prevent their approach, the greatest part of the Byzantine territory was laid waste by the Greeks themselves: the peasants and their cattle retired into the city; and myriads of sheep and oxen, for which neither place nor food could be procured, were unprofitably slaughtered on the same day. Four times the emperor Andronicus sued for peace, and four times he was inflexibly repulsed, till the want of provisions, and the discord of the chiefs, compelled the Catalans to evacuate the banks of the Hellespont and the neighborhood of the capital. After their separation from the Turks, the remains of the great company pursued their march through Macedonia and Thessaly, to seek a new establishment in the heart of Greece. [50]

[Footnote 47: In this motley multitude, the Catalans and Spaniards, the bravest of the soldiery, were styled by themselves and the Greeks Amogavares. Moncada derives their origin from the Goths, and Pachymer (l. xi. c. 22) from the Arabs; and in spite of national and religious pride, I am afraid the latter is in the right.]

[Footnote 477: On Roger de Flor and his companions, see an historical fragment, detailed and interesting, entitled "The Spaniards of the Fourteenth Century," and inserted in "L'Espagne en 1808," a work translated from the German, vol. ii. p. 167. This narrative enables us to detect some slight errors which have crept into that of Gibbon.--G.]

[Footnote 478: The troops of Roger de Flor, according to his companions Ramon de Montaner, were 1500 men at arms, 4000 Almogavares, and 1040 other foot, besides the sailors and mariners, vol. ii. p. 137.--M.]

[Footnote 479: Ramon de Montaner suppresses the cruelties and oppressions of the Catalans, in which, perhaps, he shared.--M.]

[Footnote 48: Some idea may be formed of the population of these cities, from the 36,000 inhabitants of Tralles, which, in the preceding reign, was rebuilt by the emperor, and ruined by the Turks. (Pachymer, l. vi. c. 20, 21.)]

[Footnote 49: I have collected these pecuniary circumstances from Pachymer, (l. xi. c. 21, l. xii. c. 4, 5, 8, 14, 19,) who describes the progressive degradation of the gold coin. Even in the prosperous times of John Ducas Vataces, the byzants were composed in equal proportions of the pure and the baser metal. The poverty of Michael Palæologus compelled him to strike a new coin, with nine parts, or carats, of gold, and fifteen of copper alloy. After his death, the standard rose to ten carats, till in the public distress it was reduced to the moiety. The prince was relieved for a moment, while credit and commerce were forever blasted. In France, the gold coin is of twenty-two carats, (one twelfth alloy,) and the standard of England and Holland is still higher.]

[Footnote 496]: Roger de Flor, according to Ramon de Montaner, was recalled

from Natolia, on account of the war which had arisen on the death of Asan, king of Bulgaria. Andronicus claimed the kingdom for his nephew, the sons of Asan by his sister. Roger de Flor turned the tide of success in favor of the emperor of Constantinople and made peace.--M.]

[Footnote 497: Andronicus paid the Catalans in the debased money, much to their indignation.--M.]

[Footnote 498: According to Ramon de Montaner, he was murdered by order of Kyr (kurioV) Michael, son of the emperor. p. 170.--M.]

[Footnote 499: Ramon de Montaner describes his sojourn at Gallipoli: Nous etions si riches, que nous ne semions, ni ne labourions, ni ne faisons enver des vins ni ne cultivions les vignes: et cependant tous les ans nous recucillions tout ce qu'il nous fallait, en vin, froment et avoine. p. 193. This lasted for five merry years. Ramon de Montaner is high authority, for he was "chancelier et maitre rational de l'armée," (commissary of rations.) He was left governor; all the scribes of the army remained with him, and with their aid he kept the books in which were registered the number of horse and foot employed on each expedition. According to this book the plunder was shared, of which he had a fifth for his trouble. p. 197.--M.]

[Footnote 50: The Catalan war is most copiously related by Pachymer, in the xith, xiith, and xiiiith books, till he breaks off in the year 1308. Nicephorus Gregoras (l. vii. 3--6) is more concise and complete.

Ducange, who adopts these adventurers as French, has hunted their footsteps with his usual diligence, (Hist. de C. P. l. vi. c. 22--46.) He quotes an Arragonese history, which I have read with pleasure, and which the Spaniards extol as a model of style and composition, (Expedicion de los Catalanes y Arragoneses contra Turcos y Griegos: Barcelona, 1623 in quarto: Madrid, 1777, in octavo.) Don Francisco de Moncada Conde de Osona, may imitate Cæsar or Sallust; he may transcribe the Greek or Italian contemporaries: but he never quotes his authorities, and I cannot discern any national records of the exploits of his countrymen. * Note: Ramon de Montaner, one of the Catalans, who accompanied Roger de Flor, and who was governor of Gallipoli, has written, in Spanish, the history of this band of adventurers, to which he belonged, and from which he separated when it left the Thracian Chersonese to penetrate into Macedonia and Greece.--G.----The autobiography of Ramon de Montaner has been published in French by M. Buchon, in the great collection of Mémoires relatifs à l'Histoire de France. I quote this edition.--M.]

After some ages of oblivion, Greece was awakened to new misfortunes by the arms of the Latins. In the two hundred and fifty years between the first and the last conquest of Constantinople, that venerable land was disputed by a multitude of petty tyrants; without the comforts of freedom and genius, her ancient cities were again plunged in foreign and intestine war; and, if servitude be preferable to anarchy, they might repose with joy under the Turkish yoke. I shall not pursue the obscure and various dynasties, that rose and fell on the continent or in the

isles; but our silence on the fate of Athens [51] would argue a strange ingratitude to the first and purest school of liberal science and amusement. In the partition of the empire, the principality of Athens and Thebes was assigned to Otho de la Roche, a noble warrior of Burgundy, [52] with the title of great duke, [53] which the Latins understood in their own sense, and the Greeks more foolishly derived from the age of Constantine. [54] Otho followed the standard of the marquis of Montferrat: the ample state which he acquired by a miracle of conduct or fortune, [55] was peaceably inherited by his son and two grandsons, till the family, though not the nation, was changed, by the marriage of an heiress into the elder branch of the house of Brienne. The son of that marriage, Walter de Brienne, succeeded to the duchy of Athens; and, with the aid of some Catalan mercenaries, whom he invested with fiefs, reduced above thirty castles of the vassal or neighboring lords. But when he was informed of the approach and ambition of the great company, he collected a force of seven hundred knights, six thousand four hundred horse, and eight thousand foot, and boldly met them on the banks of the River Cephisus in Botia. The Catalans amounted to no more than three thousand five hundred horse, and four thousand foot; but the deficiency of numbers was compensated by stratagem and order. They formed round their camp an artificial inundation; the duke and his knights advanced without fear or precaution on the verdant meadow; their horses plunged into the bog; and he was cut in pieces, with the greatest part of the French cavalry. His family and nation were expelled; and his son Walter de Brienne, the titular duke of Athens, the tyrant of Florence, and the constable of France, lost his life in the

field of Poitiers Attica and Botia were the rewards of the victorious Catalans; they married the widows and daughters of the slain; and during fourteen years, the great company was the terror of the Grecian states. Their factions drove them to acknowledge the sovereignty of the house of Arragon; and during the remainder of the fourteenth century, Athens, as a government or an appanage, was successively bestowed by the kings of Sicily. After the French and Catalans, the third dynasty was that of the Accaioli, a family, plebeian at Florence, potent at Naples, and sovereign in Greece. Athens, which they embellished with new buildings, became the capital of a state, that extended over Thebes, Argos, Corinth, Delphi, and a part of Thessaly; and their reign was finally determined by Mahomet the Second, who strangled the last duke, and educated his sons in the discipline and religion of the seraglio.

[Footnote 51: See the laborious history of Ducange, whose accurate table of the French dynasties recapitulates the thirty-five passages, in which he mentions the dukes of Athens.]

[Footnote 52: He is twice mentioned by Villehardouin with honor, (No. 151, 235;) and under the first passage, Ducange observes all that can be known of his person and family.]

[Footnote 53: From these Latin princes of the xivth century, Boccace, Chaucer. and Shakspeare, have borrowed their Theseus duke of Athens. An ignorant age transfers its own language and manners to the most distant times.]

[Footnote 54: The same Constantine gave to Sicily a king, to Russia the magnus dapifer of the empire, to Thebes the primicerius; and these absurd fables are properly lashed by Ducange, (ad Nicephor. Greg. 1. vii. c. 5.) By the Latins, the lord of Thebes was styled, by corruption, the Megas Kurios, or Grand Sire!]

[Footnote 55: Quodam miraculo, says Alberic. He was probably received by Michael Choniates, the archbishop who had defended Athens against the tyrant Leo Sgurus, (Nicetas urbs capta, p. 805, ed. Bek.) Michael was the brother of the historian Nicetas; and his encomium of Athens is still extant in MS. in the Bodleian library, (Fabric. Bibliot. Græc tom. vi. p. 405.) * Note: Nicetas says expressly that Michael surrendered the Acropolis to the marquis.--M.]

Athens, [56] though no more than the shadow of her former self, still contains about eight or ten thousand inhabitants; of these, three fourths are Greeks in religion and language; and the Turks, who compose the remainder, have relaxed, in their intercourse with the citizens, somewhat of the pride and gravity of their national character. The olive-tree, the gift of Minerva, flourishes in Attica; nor has the honey of Mount Hymettus lost any part of its exquisite flavor: [57] but the languid trade is monopolized by strangers, and the agriculture of a barren land is abandoned to the vagrant Walachians. The Athenians are still distinguished by the subtlety and acuteness of their

understandings; but these qualities, unless ennobled by freedom, and enlightened by study, will degenerate into a low and selfish cunning: and it is a proverbial saying of the country, "From the Jews of Thessalonica, the Turks of Negropont, and the Greeks of Athens, good Lord deliver us!" This artful people has eluded the tyranny of the Turkish bashaws, by an expedient which alleviates their servitude and aggravates their shame. About the middle of the last century, the Athenians chose for their protector the Kislar Aga, or chief black eunuch of the seraglio. This Æthiopian slave, who possesses the sultan's ear, condescends to accept the tribute of thirty thousand crowns: his lieutenant, the Waywode, whom he annually confirms, may reserve for his own about five or six thousand more; and such is the policy of the citizens, that they seldom fail to remove and punish an oppressive governor. Their private differences are decided by the archbishop, one of the richest prelates of the Greek church, since he possesses a revenue of one thousand pounds sterling; and by a tribunal of the eight geronti or elders, chosen in the eight quarters of the city: the noble families cannot trace their pedigree above three hundred years; but their principal members are distinguished by a grave demeanor, a fur cap, and the lofty appellation of archon. By some, who delight in the contrast, the modern language of Athens is represented as the most corrupt and barbarous of the seventy dialects of the vulgar Greek: [58] this picture is too darkly colored: but it would not be easy, in the country of Plato and Demosthenes, to find a reader or a copy of their works. The Athenians walk with supine indifference among the glorious ruins of antiquity; and such is the debasement of their character, that

they are incapable of admiring the genius of their predecessors. [59]

[Footnote 56: The modern account of Athens, and the Athenians, is extracted from Spon, (*Voyage en Grece*, tom. ii. p. 79--199,) and Wheeler, (*Travels into Greece*, p. 337--414,) Stuart, (*Antiquities of Athens*, passim,) and Chandler, (*Travels into Greece*, p. 23--172.) The first of these travellers visited Greece in the year 1676; the last, 1765; and ninety years had not produced much difference in the tranquil scene.]

[Footnote 57: The ancients, or at least the Athenians, believed that all the bees in the world had been propagated from Mount Hymettus. They taught, that health might be preserved, and life prolonged, by the external use of oil, and the internal use of honey, (*Geoponica*, l. xv. c. 7, p. 1089--1094, edit. Niclas.)]

[Footnote 58: Ducange, *Glossar. Græc. Præfat.* p. 8, who quotes for his author Theodosius Zygomalas, a modern grammarian. Yet Spon (tom. ii. p. 194) and Wheeler, (p. 355,) no incompetent judges, entertain a more favorable opinion of the Attic dialect.]

[Footnote 59: Yet we must not accuse them of corrupting the name of Athens, which they still call Athini. From the εἰς τὴν Ἀθῆναιον, we have formed our own barbarism of Setines. * Note: Gibbon did not foresee a Bavarian prince on the throne of Greece, with Athens as his capital.--M.]