

SAMUEL GOODRICH

FAMOUS MEN
OF ANCIENT
TIMES

Samuel Goodrich
Famous Men of Ancient Times

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=23165755

Famous Men of Ancient Times:

Содержание

PREFACE	4
MOHAMMED	6
BELISARIUS	23
ATTLA, KING OF THE HUNS	58
NERO	66
LUCIUS ANNÆUS SENECA	72
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	78

S. G. Goodrich

Famous Men of Ancient Times

PREFACE

The reader of these pages will perhaps remark, that the length of the following sketches is hardly proportioned to the relative importance of the several subjects, regarded in a merely historical point of view. In explanation of this fact, the author begs leave to say, that, while he intended to present a series of the great beacon lights that shine along the shores of the past, and thus throw a continuous gleam over the dusky sea of ancient history, – he had still other views. His chief aim is moral culture; and the several articles have been abridged or extended, as this controlling purpose might be subserved.

It may be proper to make one observation more. If the author has been somewhat more chary of his eulogies upon the great men that figure in the pages of Grecian and Roman story, than is the established custom, he has only to plead in his vindication, that he has viewed them in the same light – weighed them in the same balance – measured them by the same standard, as he should have done the more familiar characters of our own day, making due allowance for the times and circumstances in which they acted. He has stated the results of such a mode of

appreciation; yet if the master spirits of antiquity are thus shorn of some portion of their glory, the writer still believes that the interest they excite is not lessened, and that the instruction they afford is not diminished. On the contrary, it seems to him that the study of ancient biography, if it be impartial and discriminating, is one of the most entertaining and useful to which the mind can be applied.

MOHAMMED

This individual, who has exercised a greater influence upon the opinions of mankind than any other human being, save, perhaps, the Chinese philosopher Confucius, was born at Mecca, in Arabia, A. D. 570. He was the only son of Abdallah, of the noble line of Hashem and tribe of Koreish – descendants of Ishmael the reputed progenitor of the Arabian race.

The Koreishites were not only a commercial people, and rich by virtue of their operations in trade, but they were the hereditary guardians of the Caaba, or Kaaba, a heathen temple at Mecca. The custody of this sacred place, together with all the priestly offices, belonged to the ancestors of Mohammed.

The Mohammedan authors have embellished the birth of the prophet with a great variety of wonderful events, which are said to have attended his introduction into the world. One of these is, that the Persian sacred fire, kept in their temples, was at once extinguished over all Arabia, accompanied by the diffusion of an unwonted and beautiful light. But this and other marvels, we leave to the credulity of the prophet's followers.

Mohammed's father died early, and his son came under the guardianship of his uncle, Abu Taleb. He was a rich merchant, who was accustomed to visit the fairs of Damascus, Bagdad, and Bassora – three great and splendid cities, and Mohammed often accompanied him to these places. In his twelfth year,

Mohammed took part in an expedition against the wandering tribes that molested the trading caravans. Thus, by travelling from place to place, he acquired extensive knowledge, and, by being engaged in warlike enterprise, his imagination became inflamed with a love of adventure and military achievements. If we add to this, that he had naturally a love of solitude, with a constitutional tendency to religious abstraction; and if, moreover, we consider that in his childhood he had been accustomed to behold the wild exercises, the dark ceremonies, and hideous rites of the temple of Caaba – we shall at once see the elements of character, and the educational circumstances, which shaped out the extraordinary career of the founder of Islamism.

It appears that Mohammed was remarkable for mental endowments, even in his youth, for, in a religious conversation with a Nestorian monk, at Basra, he showed such knowledge and talent, that the monk remarked to his uncle, that great things might be expected of him. He was, however, attentive to business, and so completely obtained the confidence of his uncle, as a merchant, that he was recommended as a prudent and faithful young man, to Khadijah, a rich widow, who stood in need of an agent to transact her business and manage her affairs. In this capacity he was received, and so well did he discharge his duties, that he not only won the confidence of the widow, but finally obtained her hand in marriage. This event took place when he was about twenty-five years old, Khadijah being almost forty.

Mohammed was now rich, and, though he continued to

carry on mercantile business, he often retired to a cave, called Heva, near Mecca, where he resided. He also performed several journeys to different parts of Arabia and Syria, taking particular pains to gather religious information, especially of learned Jews and Christians.

For some time, Mohammed, who lived happily with his wife, confided to her his visits to the cave Heva, professing to enjoy interviews with Heaven there, by means of dreams and trances, in which he met and conversed with the angel Gabriel. There is little doubt that his habits of religious retirement and gloomy reflection had unsettled his judgment, and that he now gave himself up to the guidance of an overwrought fancy. It is probable, therefore, that he believed these visions to be of divine inspiration; else, why should he first communicate them, as realities, to his wife?

Soon after this, he informed other members of his family of his visions, and, being now about forty years old, assumed with them, the character and profession of a prophet. Several of his friends, particularly his wife, and his cousin Ali, a young man of great energy of character, yielded to the evidence he gave of his divine mission. Having been silently occupied about three years in converting his nearest friends, he invited some of the most illustrious men of the family of Hashem to his house, and, after conjuring them to abandon their idolatry, for the worship of One God, he openly proclaimed his calling, and set forth, that, by the commands of Heaven, revealed through the angel Gabriel, he

was prepared to impart to his countrymen the most precious gift – the only means of future salvation.

Far from being convinced, the assembly was struck silent with mingled surprise and contempt. The young and enthusiastic Ali, alone, yielded to his pretences, and, falling at his feet, offered to attend him, in good or evil, for life or for death. Several of the more sober part of the assembly sought to dissuade Mohammed from his enterprise; but he replied with a lofty fervor, that if the sun were placed in his right hand, and the moon in his left, with power over the kingdoms they enlighten, he would not, should not, could not hesitate or waver in his course.

Inflamed by the opposition he met with among this assembly, Mohammed now went forth, and, wherever he could find crowds of people, there he announced his mission. In the temples, in the public squares, streets, and market-places, he addressed the people, laying claim to the prophetic character, and setting forth the duty of rejecting idolatry, for the worship of one God. The people were struck with his eloquence, his majesty of person, the beautiful imagery he presented to their minds, and the sublime sentiments he promulgated. Even the poet Lebid is said to have been converted by the wonderful beauty and elevation of the thoughts poured forth by the professed prophet. The people listened, and, though they felt the fire of his eloquence, still they were so wedded to their idolatries, that few were yet disposed to join him.

To aid in understanding the revolution wrought by

Mohammed, it may be well to sketch the condition of the Arabians at that period. The original inhabitants of Arabia, though all of one stock, and occupying a peninsula 1200 miles in length by 700 in width, had been, from time immemorial, divided into a variety of distinct tribes. These constituted petty communities or states, which, often changing, still left the people essentially the same. In the more elevated table lands, intersected by mountain ridges, with dreary wastes consisting of sandy plains, the people continued to pursue a roving life, living partly upon their flocks of camels, horses, and horned cattle, and partly upon the robbery of trading caravans of other tribes. The people of the plains, being near the water, settled in towns, cultivated the soil, and pursued commerce.

The various tribes were each governed by the oldest or most worthy sheik or nobleman. Their bards met once a year, at Okhad, holding a fair of thirty days, for the recitation of their productions. That which was declared to be the finest, was written in gold and suspended in the great temple of Mecca. This was almost the only common tie between the several states or tribes, for, although they nominally acknowledged an emir, or national chief, they had never been brought to act in one body.

The adoration of the Arabians consisted chiefly in the worship of the heavenly luminaries; but they had a great variety of deities, these being personifications of certain powers in nature, or passions in mankind. They were represented by idols of every variety of shape, which were gathered around the ancient temple

of Caaba, at Mecca, a large square edifice, considered as the central point of religion, and the favorite seat of divinity. Their worship was attended with the most horrid rites and shocking ceremonies: even children were sacrificed to the idols, and one of the tribes was accustomed to bury their daughters alive. Except that they fancied the souls of the departed to be transformed into owls, hovering in gloom around the grave, it does not appear that they had the least idea of a future state of existence.

Such was the state of religion among the native Arabians. Among the foreign settlers in the towns there were a few followers of the Greek and Roman philosophy; the Christians were never numerous. These latter were divided into a variety of sects, and those belonging to the Greek church, advocated monasteries, and were addicted to the worship of images, martyrs and relics. Some of these, even elevated the Virgin Mary into a deity, and addressed her as the third person in the Trinity.

Mohammed, while he no doubt looked with horror upon this state of things, having studied the Bible, and clearly comprehended its sublime revelation of one God, conceived the idea of uniting the people of his native land under a religion of which this fundamental principle should constitute the basis. His purpose was to crush idolatry, and restore the lost worship of the true God. How far he was sincere, and how far he was an impostor, we cannot venture to affirm. It is probable that he was a religious enthusiast, deceived by his own fancies, and, perhaps, really believing his own visions. At the outset of his career, it is

likely that he acted in good faith, while he was himself deluded. When he had advanced so far as to see power and dominion offered to his grasp, it is probable that his integrity gave way, and that thenceforward we are to consider him as under the alternate guidance of craft and fanaticism.

Several of the nobles citizens of Mecca were finally converted by Mohammed. Khadijah was now dead, and the prophet had married Ayesha, the daughter of Abubeker, a man of great influence, and who exercised it in favor of his son-in-law. Yet the new faith made little progress, and a persecution of its votaries arose, which drove them to Abyssinia, and caused Mohammed himself to fly for safety to Medina. This flight is called the Hegira, and, taking place in the year 622, is the epoch from which Mohammedan chronology is computed, as is ours from the birth of Christ.

At Medina, whither his tenets had been carried by pilgrims, Mohammed was received with open arms. He was met by an imposing procession, and invested at once with the regal and sacerdotal office. The people also offered him assistance in propagating his faith, even by force, if it should be required. From this moment, a vast field seems to have been opened to the mind of Mohammed. Hitherto, he may have been but a self-deceived enthusiast; but now, ambition appears to have taken at least partial possession of his bosom. His revelations at once assumed a higher tone. Hitherto he had chiefly inculcated the doctrine of one God, eternal, omnipotent, most powerful and

most merciful, together with the practical duties of piety, prayer, charity, and pilgrimages. He now revealed, as a part of his new faith, the duty of making war, even with the sword, to propagate Islamism, and promised a sensual paradise to those who should fall in doing battle in its behalf. At the same time he announced that a settled fate or destiny hung over every individual, which he could not by possibility alter, evade, or avert.

He now raised men, and proceeded, sword in hand, to force the acknowledgment of his pretensions. With alternate victory and defeat, he continued to prosecute his schemes, and at last fell upon the towns and castles of the peaceful and unwarlike Jews. These were soon taken and plundered. But the prophet paid dearly for his triumph. A Jewish female, at the town of Chaibar, gave him poison in some drink, and, though he survived, he never fully recovered from the effects of the dose.

Thus advancing with the tribes settled in his own country, the power of the ambitious apostle increased like the avalanche in its overwhelming descent. Mecca was conquered, and yielded as well to his faith as to his arms. He now made expeditions to Palestine and Syria, while his officers were making conquests in all directions. His power was soon so great, that he sent messages to the kings of Egypt, Persia, and Ethiopia, and the emperor of Constantinople, commanding them to acknowledge the divine law revealed through him.

At last, in the tenth year of the Hegira, he proceeded on a farewell pilgrimage to Mecca. The scene was imposing beyond

description. He was attended by more than a hundred thousand of his followers, who paid him the greatest reverence. Everything in dress, equipage and imposing ceremony that could enhance the splendor of the pageant, and give it sanctity in the eyes of the people, was adopted. This was the last great event of his life.

Mohammed had now become too powerful to be resisted by force, but not too exalted to be troubled by competition. His own example in assuming the sacred character of an apostle and prophet, and the brilliant success which had attended him, gave a hint to others of the probable means of advancing themselves to a similar pitch of dignity and dominion. The spirit of emulation, therefore, raised up a fellow-prophet in the person of Moseilama, called to this day by the followers of Islam "the lying Moseilama," a descendant of the tribe of Honeifa, and a principal person in the province of Yemen.

This man headed an embassy sent by his tribe to Mohammed, in the ninth year of the Hegira, and then professed himself a Moslem; but on his return home, pondering on the nature of the new religion and the character and fortunes of its founder, the sacrilegious suggestion occurred to him, that by skilful management he might share with his countryman in the glory of a divine mission; and, accordingly, in the ensuing year he began to put his project in execution. He gave out that he, also, was a prophet sent of Heaven, having a joint commission with Mohammed to recall mankind from idolatry to the worship of the true God. He, moreover, aped his model so closely as to publish

written revelations resembling the Koran, pretended to have been derived from the same source.

Having succeeded in gaining a considerable party, from the tribe of Honeifa, he at length began to put himself still more nearly upon a level with the prophet of Medina, and even went so far as to propose to Mohammed a partnership in his spiritual supremacy. His letter commenced thus: "From Moseilama, the apostle of God, to Mohammed, the apostle of God. Now let the earth be half mine and half thine." But the latter, feeling himself too firmly established to stand in need of an associate, deigned to return him only the following reply: "From Mohammed, the apostle of God, to Moseilama, the liar. The earth is God's: he giveth the same for inheritance unto such of his servants as he pleaseth; and the happy issue shall attend those who fear him."

During the few months that Mohammed lived after this, Moseilama continued, on the whole, to gain ground, and became at length so formidable, as to occasion extreme anxiety to the prophet, now rapidly sinking under the effects of disease. An expedition, under the command of Caled, the "Sword of God," was ordered out to suppress the rival sect headed by the spurious apostle, and the bewildered imagination of Mohammed, in the moments of delirium, which now afflicted him, was frequently picturing to itself the results of the engagement between his faithful Moslems and these daring apostates.

The army of Caled returned victorious. Moseilama himself, and ten thousand of his followers, were left dead on the field;

while the rest, convinced by the shining evidence of truth that gleamed from the swords of the conquerors, renounced their errors, and fell quietly back into the bosom of the Mohammedan church. Several other insurgents of similar pretences, but of minor consequence, were crushed in like manner in the early stages of their defection.

We have now reached the period at which the religion of Mohammed may be considered as having become permanently established. The conquest of Mecca and of the Koreishites had been, in fact, the signal for the submission of the rest of Arabia; and though several of the petty tribes offered, for a time, the show of resistance to the prophet's arms, they were all eventually subdued. Between the taking of Mecca and the period of Mohammed's death, somewhat more than three years elapsed. In that short period he had destroyed the idols of Arabia; had extended his conquests to the borders of the Greek and Persian empires; had rendered his name formidable to those once mighty kingdoms; had tried his arms against the disciplined troops of the former, and defeated them in a desperate encounter at Muta.

His throne was now firmly established; and an impulse given to the Arabian nation, which induced them to invade, and enabled them to conquer, a large portion of the globe. India, Persia, the Greek empire, the whole of Asia Minor, Egypt, Barbary, and Spain, were eventually reduced by their victorious arms. Mohammed himself did not indeed live to see such mighty conquests achieved, but he commenced the train which

resulted in this wide-spread dominion, and, before his death, had established over the whole of Arabia, and some parts of Asia, the religion which he had devised.

And now, having arrived at the sixty-third year of his age, and the tenth of the Hegira, A. D. 632, the fatal effects of the poison, which had been so long rankling in his veins, began to discover themselves more and more sensibly, and to operate with alarming virulence. Day by day, he visibly declined, and it was evident that his life was hastening to a close. For some time previous to the event, he was conscious of its approach, and is said to have viewed and awaited it with characteristic firmness. The third day before his dissolution, he ordered himself to be carried to the mosque, that he might, for the last time, address his followers, and bestow upon them his parting prayers and benedictions. Being assisted to mount the pulpit, he edified his brethren by the pious tenor of his dying counsels, and in his own example taught a lesson of humility and penitence, such as we shall scarcely find inculcated in the precepts of the Koran.

"If there be any man," said the prophet, "whom I have unjustly scourged, I submit my own back to the lash of retaliation. Have I aspersed the reputation of any Mussulman? let him proclaim my fault in the face of the congregation. Has any one been despoiled of his goods? the little that I possess shall compensate the principal and the interest of the debt." "Yes," replied a voice from the crowd, "thou owest me three drachms of silver!" Mohammed heard the complaint, satisfied the demand, and thanked his

creditor that he had accused him in this world, rather than at the day of judgment. He then set his slaves at liberty, seventeen men and eleven women; directed the order of his funeral; strove to allay the lamentations of his weeping friends, and waited the approach of death. He did not expressly nominate a successor, a step which would have prevented the altercations that afterwards came so near to crushing in its infancy the religion and the empire of the Saracens; but his appointment of Abubeker to supply his place in the function of public prayer, and the other services of the mosque, seemed to intimate indirectly the choice of the prophet. This ancient and faithful friend, accordingly, after much contention, became the first Caliph of the Saracens, though his reign was closed by his death at the end of two years.

The death of Mohammed was hastened by the force of a burning fever, which deprived him at times of the use of reason. In one of these paroxysms of delirium, he demanded pen and paper, that he might compose or dictate a divine book. Omar, who was watching at his side, refused his request, lest the expiring prophet might dictate something which should supersede the Koran. Others, however, expressed a great desire that the book might be written; and so warm a dispute arose in the chamber of the apostle that he was forced to reprove their unbecoming vehemence. The writing was not performed, and many of his followers have mourned the loss of the sublime revelations which his dying visions might have bequeathed to them.

The favorite wife of the prophet, Ayesha, hung over her husband in his last moments, sustaining his drooping head upon her knee, as he lay stretched upon the carpet; watching with trembling anxiety his changing countenance, and listening to the last broken sounds of his voice. His disease, as it drew towards its termination, was attended at intervals with most excruciating pains, which he constantly ascribed to the fatal morsel taken at Chaibar; and as the mother of Bashar, his companion who had died upon the spot from the same cause, stood by his side, he exclaimed, "O mother of Bashar, the cords of my heart are now breaking of the food which I ate with your son at Chaibar." In his conversation with those around him, he mentioned it as a special prerogative granted to him, that the angel of death was not allowed to take his soul till he had respectfully asked permission of him, and this permission he condescendingly granted. Recovering from a swoon into which the violence of his pains had thrown him, he raised his eyes towards the roof of the house, and with faltering accents exclaimed, "O God! pardon my sins. Yes, I come among my fellow-laborers on high!" His face was then sprinkled with water, by his own feeble hand, and shortly after he expired.

The city, and more especially the house of the prophet, became at once a scene of sorrowful but confused lamentation. Some of his followers could not believe that he was dead. "How can he be dead, our witness, our intercessor, our mediator with God? He is not dead. Like Moses and Jesus, he is wrapped in a

holy trance, and speedily will he return to his faithful people." The evidence of sense was disregarded, and Omar, brandishing his scimitar, threatened to strike off the heads of the infidels who should affirm that the prophet was no more. The tumult was at length appeased, by the moderation of Abubeker. "Is it Mohammed," said he, "or the God of Mohammed, whom ye worship? The God of Mohammed liveth forever, but the apostle was a mortal like ourselves, and, according to his own prediction, he hath experienced the common fate of mortality."

The prophet's remains were deposited at Medina, in the very room where he breathed his last, the floor being removed to make way for his sepulchre, and a simple and unadorned monument was, some time after, erected over them. The house itself has long since mouldered, or been demolished, but the place of the prophet's interment is still made conspicuous to the superstitious reverence of his disciples. The story of his relics being suspended in the air, by the power of loadstone in an iron coffin, and that too at Mecca, instead of Medina, is a mere idle fabrication. His tomb at the latter place has been visited by millions of pilgrims, and, from the authentic accounts of travellers who have visited both these holy cities in disguise, we learn that it is constructed of plain mason work, fixed without elevation upon the surface of the ground. The urn which encloses his body is protected by a trellis of iron, which no one is permitted to pass.

The Koran or Alkoran, meaning *the Book*, is a collection of

all the various fragments which the prophet uttered during the period in which he professed to exercise the apostolic office. They were originally written on scattered leaves, but they were collected by Abubeker, two years after Mohammed's death. They are in the purest and most refined dialect of Arabia, and are distinguished by extraordinary graces of style.

The Koran furnishes not only the divinity, but the civil law of the Mohammedans. It professes to contain the revelation of God's will by Gabriel to Mohammed, and through him to mankind. One of the books gives an account of the translation of the prophet by night to the third heaven, upon a winged animal, named Alborak, and resembling an ass, where he saw unutterable things. The great doctrines of the Koran, as before stated, are the existence of one supreme God, to whom alone adoration and obedience are due. It declares that the divine law was faithfully delivered by Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Christ. It declares the immortality of the soul of man, and the final judgment, and sets forth that the good are to dwell in everlasting bliss, amid shady and delicious groves, and attended by heavenly virgins. The hope of salvation is not confined to the Moslem, but is extended to all who believe in God and do good works. Sinners, particularly unbelievers, are to be driven about in a dark burning hell, forever.

The practical duties enjoined by the Koran, are the propagation of Islamism, and prayers directed to the temple of Mecca, at five different periods of the day, together with fasting,

alms, religious ablutions, pilgrimages to Mecca, &c. It allows a man but four wives, though the prophet had seventeen, and it is curious to add that all were widows, save one. It strongly prohibits usury, gaming, wine and pork.

We cannot deny to Mohammed the possession of extraordinary genius. He was a man of great eloquence, and the master of a beautiful style of composition; and he possessed that majesty of person, which, united to his mental qualities, gave him great ascendancy over those who came into his presence. He lived in a dark age, amid a benighted people; yet, without the aids of education, he mastered the religious systems of the day, and took a broad and sagacious view of the moral and political condition of the people of Asia. He conceived the sublime idea of uniting, by one mighty truth, the broken fragments of his own nation, and the destruction of idolatry by the substitution of the worship of one God. It is true, that he sought to accomplish these ends by unlawful means – by imposture, and the bloody use of the sword; we must admit, also, that he was licentious and although we cannot fail to condemn his character, we must acknowledge the splendor of his abilities and allow that while he imposed on his followers, he established a faith infinitely above Paganism, and sprinkled with many rays of light from the fountain of Divine Truth.

BELISARIUS

This celebrated general, to whom the emperor Justinian is chiefly indebted for the glory of his reign, was a native of Germania, on the confines of Thrace, and was born about the year 505. It is probable that he was of noble descent, liberally educated, and a professor of the Christian faith. The first step in his military career was an appointment in the personal guard of Justinian, while that prince was yet heir apparent to the throne.

The Roman or Byzantine empire, at this period, embraced almost exactly the present territory of the Turkish dominions in Europe and Asia Minor, with the addition of Greece – Constantinople being its capital. Italy was held by the Goths; Corsica, Sardinia and Barbary in Africa, by the Vandals.

Justin I., an Illyrian peasant, having distinguished himself as a soldier, had become emperor. His education was of course neglected, and such was his ignorance, that his signature could only be obtained by means of a wooden case, which directed his pen through the four first letters of his name. From his accession, the chief administration of affairs devolved on Justinian, his nephew and intended heir, whom he was reluctantly compelled to raise from office to office, and at length to acknowledge as his partner on the throne. His death, after a languid reign of nine years and a life of nearly fourscore, left Justinian sole sovereign in name, as well as in fact.

In order to appreciate the life and actions of Belisarius, it is necessary to understand the character of the new emperor, during whose long reign his great exploits were performed. The first act of Justinian on ascending the throne, was to marry a dissolute actress, named Theodora, who, though licentious, avaricious, cruel and vindictive, soon acquired an almost complete control over him. His mind was essentially feeble and inconstant, and, though his Christian faith was doubtless sincere, it was less fruitful of virtues than of rites and forms. At his accession his treasury was full; but it was soon exhausted by his profuseness, and heavy taxes were imposed, offices put to sale, charities suppressed, private fortunes seized, and, in short, every act of rapacity, injustice and oppression, practised by his ministers, to support the wasteful magnificence of the court.

The troops of the empire at this period were by no means what they had been in the time of Scipio and Cæsar. They consisted, to a great extent, of foreign mercenaries, and were divided into squadrons according to their country; thus destroying all unity of feeling, and annihilating that national spirit which once made the Roman arms the terror of the world. These hired troops, which greatly outnumbered the native soldiers, marched under their own national banner, were commanded by their own officers, and usually followed their own military regulations. The inefficiency of such mingled and discordant forces, is obvious; yet it was under such a system that Belisarius entered upon his military career.

With a feeble and corrupt government, an ill-appointed and trustless army, the Roman empire was still surrounded with powerful enemies. It is scarcely possible to conceive of a great nation in a condition of more complete debility and helplessness, than was the kingdom of the Cæsars, at the period in which Belisarius appears upon the active stage of life.

Kobad, king of Persia, after a long cessation of hostilities, renewed the war toward the close of Justin's reign, by the invasion of Iberia, which claimed the protection of the emperor. At this period, Belisarius, being about twenty years of age, had the command of a squadron of horse, and was engaged in some of the conflicts with the Persian forces, on the borders of Armenia. In conjunction with an officer named Sittas, he ravaged a large extent of territory, and brought back a considerable number of prisoners.

On a second incursion, however, they were less fortunate; for, being suddenly attacked by the Persian forces, they were entirely defeated. It appears that Belisarius incurred no blame, for he was soon after promoted to the post of governor of Dara, and the command of the forces stationed there. It was at this place that he chose Procopius, the historian, as his secretary, and who afterwards repaid his kindness by a vain attempt to brand his name with enduring infamy.

Soon after Belisarius obtained the command of Dara, Justinian came to the throne, and enjoined it upon his generals to strengthen the defences of the empire in that quarter. This

was attempted, but the Persians baffled the effort. Belisarius was now appointed general of the East, being commander-in-chief of the whole line of the Asiatic frontier. Foreseeing that a formidable struggle was soon to ensue, he applied himself to the raising and disciplining an army. He traversed the neighboring provinces in person, and at last succeeded in mustering five and twenty thousand men. These, however, were without discipline, and their spirit was depressed by the ill success that had long attended the Roman arms.

In this state of things, the news suddenly came, that 40,000 men, the flower of the Persian army, commanded by Firouz, was marching upon Dara. Confident of victory, the Persian general announced his approach, by the haughty message that a bath should be ready for him at Dara the next evening. Belisarius made no other reply than preparations for battle. Fortifying himself in the best manner he was able, he awaited the onset; exhorting his men, however, by every stimulating motive he could suggest, to do honor to the name and fame of Rome.

The battle began by a mutual discharge of arrows, so numerous as to darken the air. When the quivers were exhausted, they came to closer combat. The struggle was obstinate and bloody; and the Persians were already about to win the victory, when a body of horse, judiciously stationed behind a hill by Belisarius, rushed forward, and turned the tide of success. The Persians fled, and the triumph of Belisarius was complete. They left their royal standard upon the field of battle, with 8000 slain.

This victory had a powerful effect, and decided the fate of the campaign.

The aged Kobad, who had conceived a profound contempt for the Romans, was greatly irritated by the defeat of his troops. He determined upon a still more powerful effort, and the next season sent a formidable army to invade Syria. Belisarius, with a promptitude that astounded the enemy, proceeded to the defence of this province, and, with an inferior force, compelled the Persian army to retreat. Obligated at length, by his soldiers, against his own judgment, to give battle to the enemy, he suffered severely, and only avoided total defeat by the greatest coolness and address. Even the partial victory of the enemy was without advantage to them, for they were obliged to retreat, and abandon their enterprise. Soon after this event, Kobad died, in his eighty-third year, and his successor, Nushirvan, concluded a treaty of peace with Justinian.

The war being thus terminated, Belisarius took up his residence at Constantinople, and here became the second husband of Antonina, who, though the child of an actress, had contracted an exalted marriage on account of her beauty, and having filled a high office, enjoyed the rank and honors of a patrician. While thus raised above the dangerous profession of her mother, she still adhered to the morals of the stage. Though openly licentious, she obtained through her bold, decided, and intriguing character, aided by remarkable powers of fascination, a complete ascendancy over Belisarius. It is seldom that a

man is great in all respects, and the weakness of the general whose history we are delineating, was exhibited in a blind and submissive attachment to this profligate woman.

A singular outbreak of popular violence occurred about this period, which stained the streets of Constantinople with blood, and threatened for a time to hurl Justinian from his throne. The fondness of the Romans for the amusements of the circus, had in no degree abated. Indeed, as the gladiatorial combats had been suppressed, these games were frequented with redoubled ardor. The charioteers were distinguished by the various colors of red, white, blue, and green, intending to represent the four seasons. Those of each color, especially the blue and green, possessed numerous and devoted partisans, which became at last connected with civil and religious prejudices.

Justinian favored the Blues, who became for that reason the emblem of royalty; on the other hand, the Greens became the type of disaffection. Though these dangerous factions were denounced by the statutes, still, at the period of which we speak, each party were ready to lavish their fortunes, risk their lives, and brave the severest sentence of the laws, in support of their darling color. At the commencement of the year 532, by one of those sudden caprices which are often displayed by the populace, the two factions united, and turned their vengeance against Justinian. The prisons were forced, and the guards massacred. The city was then fired in various parts, the cathedral of St. Sophia, a part of the imperial palace, and a great number of public and

private buildings, were wrapped in conflagration. The cry of "*Nika! Nika!*" Vanquish! Vanquish! ran through every part of the capital.

The principal citizens hurried to the opposite shore of the Bosphorus, and the emperor entrenched himself within his palace. In the mean time, Hypatius, nephew of the emperor Anastatius, was declared emperor by the rioters, and so formidable had the insurrection now become, that Justinian was ready to abdicate his crown. For the first and last time, Theodora seemed worthy of the throne, for she withstood the pusillanimity of her husband, and, through her animated exhortations, it was determined to take the chance of victory or death.

Justinian's chief hope now rested on Belisarius. Assisted by Mundus, the governor of Illyria, who chanced to be in the capital, he now called upon the guards to rally in defence of the emperor; but these refused to obey him. Meanwhile, by another caprice the party of the Blues, becoming ashamed of their conduct, shrunk one by one away, and left Hypatius to be sustained by the Greens alone.

These were dismayed at seeing Belisarius, issuing with a few troops which he had collected, from the smoking ruins of the palace. Drawing his sword, and commanding his veterans to follow, he fell upon them like a thunderbolt. Mundus, with another division of soldiers, rushed upon them from the opposite direction. The insurgents were panic-struck, and dispersed in every quarter. Hypatius was dragged from the throne which he

had ascended a few hours before, and was soon after executed in prison. The Blues now emerged from their concealment, and, falling upon their antagonists, glutted their merciless and ungovernable vengeance. No less than thirty thousand persons were slain in this fearful convulsion.

We must now turn our attention to Africa, in which the next exploits of Belisarius were performed. The northern portion of this part of the world, known to us by the merited by-word of Barbary, hardly retains a trace of the most formidable rival and opulent province of Rome. After the fall of Jugurtha, at the commencement of the second century, it had enjoyed a long period of prosperity and peace – having escaped the sufferings which had fallen upon every other portion of the empire. The Africans in the fifth century were abounding in wealth, population, and resources. During the minority of Valentinian, Boniface was appointed governor of Africa. Deceived by Ætius into a belief of ingratitude on the part of the government at home, he determined upon resistance, and with this view, concluded a treaty with the Vandals in the southern portion of Spain.

These, embarking from Andalusia, whose name still denotes their former residence, landed at the opposite cape of Ceuta, A. D. 429. Their leader was the far-famed Genseric, one of the most able, but most lawless and bloody monarchs recorded in history. Of a middle stature, and lamed by a fall from his horse, his demeanor was thoughtful and silent; he was contemptuous of luxury, sudden in anger, and boundless in ambition. Yet his

impetuosity was always guided and restrained by cunning. He well knew how to tempt the allegiance of a foreign nation, to cast the seeds of future discord, or to rear them to maturity.

The barbarians on their passage to Africa consisted of 50,000 fighting men, with a great crowd of women and children. Their progress through the African province was rapid and unopposed, till Boniface, discovering the artifices of Ætius, and the favorable disposition of the government of Rome, bitterly repented the effects of his hasty resentment. He now endeavored to withdraw his Vandal allies; but he found it less easy to allay, than it had been to raise, the storm. His proposals were haughtily rejected, and both parties had recourse to arms. Boniface was defeated, and in the event, Genseric obtained entire possession of the Roman provinces in Africa.

Carthage, which had risen from its ruins at the command of Julius Cæsar and been embellished by Diocletian, had regained a large share of its former opulence and pride, and might be considered, at the time of which we speak, the second city in the western empire. Making this his capital, Genseric proceeded to adopt various measures to increase his power, and, among others, determined upon the creation of a naval force. With him, project and performance were never far asunder. His ships soon rode in the Mediterranean, and carried terror and destruction in their train. He annexed to his kingdom the Balearic islands, Corsica and Sardinia; the last of which was afterwards allotted by the Vandals as a place of exile or imprisonment for captive Moors;

and during many years, the ports of Africa were what they became in more recent days, the abode of fierce and unpunished pirates.

With every returning spring, the fleet of Genseric ravaged the coasts of Italy and Sicily, and even of Greece and Illyria, sometimes bearing off the inhabitants to slavery, and sometimes levelling their cities to the ground. Emboldened by long impunity, he attacked every government alike. On one occasion, when sailing from Carthage, he was asked by the pilot of his vessel to what coast he desired to steer – "Leave the guidance to God," exclaimed the stern barbarian; "God will doubtless lead us against the guilty objects of his anger!"

The most memorable achievement of Genseric, the sack of Rome in 455, is an event too much out of the track of our narrative to be detailed here. We can only pause to state, that, after spending a fortnight in that great metropolis, and loading his fleets with its spoils, he returned to Africa, bearing the Empress Eudocia thither, as his captive. She was, at length, released, but one of her daughters was compelled by Genseric to accept his son in marriage.

The repeated outrages of the Vandal king at length aroused the tardy resentment of the court of Constantinople, and Leo I., then emperor, despatched an army against him, consisting of nearly one hundred thousand men, attended by the most formidable fleet that had ever been launched by the Romans. The commander was a weak man, and being cheated into a truce

of five days by Genseric, the latter took advantage of a moment of security, and, in the middle of the night, caused a number of small vessels, filled with combustibles, to be introduced among the Roman ships. A conflagration speedily ensued; and the Romans, starting from their slumbers, found themselves encompassed by fire and the Vandals. The wild shrieks of the perishing multitude mingled with the crackling of the flames and the roaring of the winds; and the enemy proved as unrelenting as the elements. The greater part of the fleet was destroyed, and only a few shattered ships, and a small number of survivors, found their way back to Constantinople.

A peace soon followed this event, which continued uninterrupted till the time of Justinian. Genseric died in 477, leaving his kingdom to his son Hunneric. About the year 530, Gelimer being upon the Vandal throne, Justinian began to meditate an expedition against him. His generals, with the exception of Belisarius, were averse to the undertaking. The same feeling was shared by many of the leading men about the court, and in an assembly, in which the subject was under discussion, Justinian was about to yield to the opposition, when a bishop from the east earnestly begged admission to his presence.

On entering the council chamber he exhorted the emperor to stand forth as the champion of the church, and, in order to confirm him in the enterprise, he declared that the Lord had appeared to him in a vision, saying, "I will march before him in his battles, and make him sovereign of Africa." Men

seldom reject a tale, however fantastic, which coincides with their wishes or their prepossessions. All the doubts of Justinian were at once removed; he commanded a fleet and army to be forthwith equipped for this sacred enterprise, and endeavored still further to insure its success by his austerity in fasts and vigils. Belisarius was named supreme commander, still retaining his title as General of the East.

In the month of June, A. D. 533, the Roman armament, consisting of five hundred transports, with twenty thousand sailors, and nearly the same number of soldiers, became ready for departure. The general embarked, attended on this occasion by Antonina and his secretary, the historian Procopius, who, at first, had shared in the popular fear and distaste of the enterprise, but had afterwards been induced to join it by a hopeful dream. The galley of Belisarius was moored near the shore, in front of the imperial palace, where it received a last visit from Justinian, and a solemn blessing from the patriarch of the city. A soldier recently baptized was placed on board, to secure its prosperous voyage; its sails were then unfurled, and, with the other ships in its train, it glided down the straits of the Bosphorus, and gradually disappeared from the lingering gaze of the assembled multitude.

With a force scarcely one fourth as strong as that which was annihilated by Genseric, about seventy years before, Belisarius proceeded upon his expedition. Having touched at Sicily and Malta, he proceeded to the coast of Africa, where he landed in September, about one hundred and fifty miles from Carthage,

and began his march upon that city. He took several towns, but enforcing the most rigid discipline upon his troops, and treating the inhabitants with moderation and courtesy, he entirely gained their confidence and good will. They brought ample provisions to his camp, and gave him such a reception as might be expected rather by a native than a hostile army.

When the intelligence of the landing and progress of the Romans reached Gelimer, who was then at Hermione, he was roused to revenge, and took his measures with promptitude and skill. He had an army of eighty thousand men, the greater part of whom were soon assembled, and posted in a defile about ten miles from Carthage, directly in the route by which Belisarius was approaching. Several severe skirmishes soon followed, in which the Vandals were defeated.

The main army now advanced, and a general engagement immediately ensued. In the outset, the Vandals prevailed, and the Romans were on the eve of flying, defeated, from the field. A pause on the part of Gelimer was, however, seized upon by Belisarius to collect and rally his forces, and with a united effort he now charged the Vandal army. The conflict was fierce, but brief: Gelimer was totally defeated, and, with a few faithful adherents, he sought safety in flight. Knowing that the ruinous walls of Carthage could not sustain a siege, he took his way to the deserts of Numidia.

All idea of resistance was abandoned; the gates of Carthage were thrown open, and the chains across the entrance of the

port were removed. The Roman fleet soon after arrived, and was safely anchored in the harbor. On the 16th September, Belisarius made a solemn entry into the capital. Having taken every precaution against violence and rapacity, not a single instance of tumult or outrage occurred, save that a captain of one of the vessels plundered some of the inhabitants, but was obliged to restore the spoil he had taken. The soldiers marched peaceably to their quarters; the inhabitants continued to pursue their avocations; the shops remained open, and, in spite of the change of sovereigns, public business was not for a moment interrupted! Belisarius took up his quarters in the palace of Gelimer, and in the evening held a sumptuous banquet there, being attended by the same servants who had so lately been employed by the Vandal king.

With his usual activity, Belisarius immediately applied himself to the restoration of the ruinous ramparts of the city. The ditch was deepened, the breaches filled, the walls strengthened, and the whole was completed in so short a space as to strike the Vandals with amazement. Meanwhile, Gelimer was collecting a powerful army at Bulla, on the borders of Numidia at the distance of four days' journey from Carthage.

Having placed the capital in a proper state for defence, at the end of three months from its capture, Belisarius led forth his army, leaving only five hundred troops to guard the city. Gelimer was now within twenty miles of the capital, having raised an army of one hundred thousand men. No sooner had the Romans taken

up their march toward his camp, than they prepared for battle. The armies soon met, and Belisarius, having determined to direct all his endeavors against the centre of the Vandal force, caused a charge to be made by some squadrons of the horse guards. These were repulsed, and a second onset, also, proved unsuccessful.

But a third prevailed, after an obstinate resistance. The ranks of the enemy were broken; Zazo, the king's brother, was slain, and consternation now completed the rout of the Vandals. Gelimer, under the influence of panic, betook himself to flight; his absence was perceived, and his conduct imitated. The soldiers dispersed in all directions, leaving their camp, their goods, their families, all in the hands of the Romans. Belisarius seized upon the royal treasure in behalf of his sovereign, and in spite of his commands, the licentious soldiers spent the night in debauchery, violence and plunder.

Gelimer fled to the mountains of Papua, inhabited by a savage but friendly tribe of Moors. He sought refuge in the small town of Medenus, which presented a craggy precipice on all sides. Belisarius returned to Carthage, and sent out various detachments, which rapidly subdued the most remote portions of the Vandal kingdom.

Immediately after the capture of Carthage, he had despatched one of his principal officers to Justinian, announcing these prosperous events. The intelligence arrived about the time that the emperor had completed his *pandects*.¹ The exultation of

¹ These were a digest of the civil law of Rome, made by the order of Justinian,

the monarch is evinced by the swelling titles he assumes in the preamble of these laws. All mention of the general by whom his conquests had been achieved, is carefully avoided; while the emperor is spoken of as the "pious," "happy," "victorious," and "triumphant!" He even boasts, in his Institutes, of the warlike fatigues he had borne, though he had never quitted the luxurious palace of Constantinople, except for recreation in some of his neighboring villas.

While the Roman general was actively employed at Carthage, Pharus was proceeding in the siege of Medenus, which had been begun immediately after the flight of Gelimer. Pent up in this narrow retreat, the sufferings of the Vandal monarch were great, from the want of supplies and the savage habits of the Moors. His lot was likewise embittered by the recollection of the soft and luxurious life to which he had lately been accustomed.

During their dominion in Africa, the Vandals had declined from their former hardihood, and yielded to the enervating influence of climate, security and success. Their arms were laid aside; gold embroidery shone upon their silken robes, and every dainty from the sea and land were combined in their rich repasts. Reclining in the shade of delicious gardens, their careless hours were amused by dancers and musicians, and no exertion beyond the chase, interrupted their voluptuous repose. The Moors of

and have been preserved to our time. They contained five hundred and thirty-four decisions or judgments of lawyers, to which the emperor gave the force of law. The compilation consists of fifty books, and has contributed to save Justinian's name from the contempt and reproach which had otherwise been heaped upon it.

Papua, on the contrary, dwelt in narrow huts, sultry in summer, and pervious to the snows of winter. They most frequently slept upon the bare ground, and a sheepskin for a couch was a rare refinement. The same dress, a cloak and a tunic, clothed them at every season, and they were strangers to the use of both bread and wine. Their grain was devoured in its crude state, or at best was coarsely pounded and baked, with little skill, into an unleavened paste.

Compelled to share this savage mode of life, Gelimer and his attendants began to consider captivity, or even death, as better than the daily hardships they endured. To avail himself of this favorable disposition, Pharus, in a friendly letter, proposed a capitulation, and assured Gelimer of generous treatment from Belisarius and Justinian. The spirit of the Vandal prince, however, was still not wholly broken, and he refused the offers, while acknowledging the kindness of his enemy. In his answer he entreated the gifts of a lyre, a loaf of bread, and a sponge, and his messenger explained the grounds of this singular petition. At Medenus, he had never tasted the food of civilized nations, he wished to sing to music an ode on his misfortunes written by himself, and a swelling on his eyes needed a sponge for its cure. The brave Roman, touched with pity that such wants should be felt by the grandson and successor of Genseric, forthwith sent these presents up the mountain, but by no means abated the watchfulness of his blockade.

The siege had already continued for upwards of three months,

and several Vandals had sunk beneath its hardships, but Gelimer still displayed the stubborn inflexibility usual to despotic rulers, when the sight of a domestic affliction suddenly induced him to yield. In the hovel where he sat gloomily brooding over his hopeless fortunes, a Moorish woman was preparing, at the fire, some coarse dough. Two children, her son and the nephew of Gelimer, were watching her progress with the eager anxiety of famine. The young Vandal was the first to seize the precious morsel, still glowing with heat, and blackened with ashes, when the Moor, by blows and violence, forced it from his mouth. So fierce a struggle for food, at such an age, overcame the sternness of Gelimer. He agreed to surrender on the same terms lately held out to him, and the promises of Pharus were confirmed by the Roman general, who sent Cyprian as his envoy to Papua. The late sovereign of Africa reentered his capital as a suppliant and a prisoner, and at the suburb of Aclas, beheld his conqueror for the first time.

With the capitulation of Gelimer, the Vandal was at an end. There now remained to Belisarius but the important task of making the conquered countries permanently useful to the Romans. But, while occupied in this design, his glory having provoked envy, he was accused to Justinian of the intention of making himself king over the territories he had conquered. With the weakness of a little mind, the emperor so far yielded to the base accusation as to send a message to Belisarius, indicating his suspicions. The latter immediately departed from Carthage,

and, taking with him his spoils and captives, proceeded to Constantinople.

This ready obedience dissipated the suspicions of the emperor, and he made ample and prompt reparation for his unfounded jealousy. Medals were struck by his orders, bearing on one side the effigy of the emperor, and on the other that of the victorious general, encircled by the inscription, *Belisarius, the glory of the Romans*. Beside this, the honors of a triumph were decreed him, the first ever witnessed in the Eastern capital.

The ceremony was in the highest degree imposing. The triumphal procession marched from the house of Belisarius to the hippodrome,² filled with exulting thousands, where Justinian and Theodora sat enthroned. Among the Vandal captives, Gelimer was distinguished by the purple of a sovereign. He shed no tears, but frequently repeated the words of Solomon, "Vanity of vanities: all is vanity." When he reached the imperial throne, and was commanded to cast aside the ensigns of royalty, Belisarius hastened to do the same, to show him that he was to undergo no insult as a prisoner, but only to yield the customary homage of a subject. We may pause for a moment to reflect upon the caprices of fortune, which had raised a comedian, in the person of Theodora, to see the successor of Genseric and Scipio prostrate as slaves before her footstool.

Both the conqueror and captive experienced the effects of imperial generosity. The former received a large share of the

² A space where the chariot races were exhibited.

spoil as his reward, and was named consul for the ensuing year. To the Vandal monarch, an extensive estate in Galatia was assigned, to which he retired, and, in peaceful obscurity, spent the remainder of his days.

We must now turn our attention to Italy. Theodoric the Great, the natural son of Theodomir, king of the Ostrogoths, became the master of Italy toward the close of the fifth century. The Gothic dominion was thus established in the ancient seat of the Roman empire, and the king of the Goths was seated upon the throne of the Cæsars.

Theodoric has furnished one of the few instances in which a successful soldier has abandoned warlike pursuits for the duties of civil administration, and, instead of seeking power by his arms, has devoted himself to the improvement of his kingdom by a peaceful policy. Upright and active in his conduct, he enforced discipline among his soldiers, and so tempered his general kindness by acts of salutary rigor, that he was loved as if indulgent, yet obeyed as if severe. He applied himself to the revival of trade, the support of manufactures, and the encouragement of agriculture.

At the death of this great monarch, in 526, his grandson, Athalaric, then only ten years of age, became king. After a nominal reign of eight years he died in consequence of his dissipations, and was succeeded by Theodatus, the nephew of Theodoric. This prince having attained the throne by the murder of Amalasontha, the widow of Theodoric, Justinian regarded

him as an usurper stained with an atrocious crime, and therefore determined to drive him from his throne.

Accordingly, a force of twelve thousand men was despatched to Italy under Belisarius. Landing at Catania, in Sicily, they surprised the Goths, and had little difficulty in reducing the island. Fixing his head quarters at Syracuse, he was making preparations to enter the heart of Italy, when a messenger came to inform him that a serious insurrection had broken out at Carthage. He immediately set out for that place. On his arrival the insurgents fled, but Belisarius pursued them, overtook them, and, though their force was four times as great as his own, they were completely defeated in a pitched battle. Returning to Carthage, the Roman general was informed by a messenger from Sicily that a formidable mutiny had broken out in his army there. He immediately embarked, and soon restored his troops to order and discipline.

The rapid conquest of Sicily by Belisarius struck terror into the heart of king Theodatus, who was weak by nature, and depressed by age. He was therefore induced to subscribe an ignominious treaty with Justinian, some of the conditions of which forcibly display the pusillanimity of one emperor, and the vanity of the other. Theodatus promised that no statue should be raised to his honor, without another of Justinian at his right hand, and that the imperial name should always precede his own in the acclamations of the people, at public games and festivals: as if the shouts of the rabble were matter for a treaty!

But even this humiliating compact was not sufficient for the grasping avarice of Justinian. He required of Theodatus the surrender of his throne, which the latter promised; but before the compact could be carried into effect, he was driven from his throne, and Vittiges, a soldier of humble birth, but great energy and experience, was declared his successor. Establishing his headquarters at Ravenna, the Gothic king was making preparations to sustain his cause, when Belisarius, who had taken Naples, was invited to Rome by Pope Sylverius. Taking advantage of this opportunity, he immediately advanced, and triumphantly entered the "eternal city."

Rome had now been under the dominion of its Gothic conquerors for sixty years, during which it had enjoyed the advantages of peace and prosperity. It had been the object of peculiar care, attention, and munificence, and had received the respect due to the ancient mistress of the world. Still, the people at large looked upon their rulers as foreigners and barbarians, and desired the return of the imperial sway, seeming to forget that they were preferring a foreign to a native government.

Belisarius lost no time in repairing the fortifications of Rome, while he actively extended his conquests in the southern parts of Italy. His military fame was now a host, and most of the towns submitted, either from a preference of the Byzantine government, or respect for the military prowess of the Roman general.

The great achievements of Belisarius strike us with wonder,

when we consider the feeble means with which they were accomplished. His force at the outset of his invasion of Italy did not exceed 12,000 men. These were now much reduced by the bloody siege of Naples, and by his subsequent successes, which made it necessary to supply garrisons for the captured towns.

Vittiges, in his Adriatic capital, had spent the winter in preparations, and when the spring arrived, he set forth with a powerful army. Knowing the small force of Belisarius, he hurried forward towards Rome, fearing only that his enemy should escape by flight. The genius of Belisarius never shone with greater lustre than at this moment. By numerous devices he contrived to harass the Gothic army in their march, but owing to the flight of a detachment of his troops whom he had stationed at one of the towers, to delay their progress, they at last came upon him by surprise.

He was at the moment without the city, attended by only a thousand of his guards, when suddenly he found himself surrounded by the van of the Gothic cavalry. He now displayed not only the skill of a general, but the personal courage and prowess of a soldier. Distinguished by the charger whom he had often rode in battle – a bay with a white face – he was seen in the foremost ranks, animating his men to the conflict. "That is Belisarius," exclaimed some Italian deserters, who knew him. "Aim at the bay!" was forthwith the cry through the Gothic squadrons and a cloud of arrows was soon aimed at the conspicuous mark. It seemed as if the fate of Italy was felt to be

suspended upon a single life – so fierce was the struggle to kill or capture the Roman leader.

Amid the deadly strife, however, Belisarius remained unhurt; and it is said that more of the army fell that day by his single arm, than by that of any other Roman. His guards displayed the utmost courage and devotion to his person, rallying around him, and raising their bucklers on every side, to ward off the showers of missiles that flew with deadly aim at his breast. Not less than a thousand of the enemy fell in the conflict – a number equal to the whole Roman troop engaged in the battle. The Goths at length gave way, and Belisarius, with his guards, reentered the city.

On the morrow, March 12th, A. D. 537, the memorable siege of Rome began. Finding it impossible, even with their vast army, to encircle the entire walls of the city, which were twelve miles in length, the Goths selected five of the fourteen gates, and invested them. They now cut through the aqueducts, in order to stop the supply of water, and several of them, having never been repaired, remain to this day, extending into the country, and seeming like the "outstretched and broken limbs of an expiring giant."

Though the baths of the city were stopped, the Tiber supplied the people with water for all needful purposes. The resources and activity of Belisarius knew no bounds: yet he had abundant occasion for all the advantages these could supply. The relative smallness of his force, the feebleness of the defences the fickleness and final disaffection of the people, the intrigues of Vittiges, and his vastly superior army constituted a web of

difficulties which would have overwhelmed any other than a man whose genius could extort good from evil, and convert weakness into strength.

For a whole year, the encircling walls of Rome were the scenes of almost incessant attack and defence. The fertile genius of Vittiges suggested a thousand expedients, and the number as well as courage of his troops enabled him to plan and execute a variety of daring schemes. Yet he was always baffled by his vigilant rival, and his most elaborate devices were rendered fruitless by the superior genius of the Roman general. At last, on the 21st of March, A. D. 538, foreseeing that Belisarius was about to receive reinforcements, and despairing of success in the siege, Vittiges withdrew his army, suffering in his retreat a fearful massacre, from a sally of the Roman troops.

Vittiges retired to Ravenna, and Belisarius soon invested it. While he was pressing the siege, Justinian, probably alarmed by the threats of the Persian king, entered into a treaty with the ambassadors of Vittiges, by which he agreed to a partition of Italy, taking one half himself, and allowing the Gothic king to retain the other portion. Belisarius refused to ratify this treaty, and soon after, was pressed by the Goths to become their king. Vittiges even joined in this request, and Belisarius had now the easy opportunity of making himself the emperor of the West, without the remotest fear of failure. But he was too deeply impressed with his oath of allegiance, to allow him to entertain a treacherous design toward his sovereign, and he

rejected the tempting offer. The merit of his fidelity under these circumstances, is heightened by the consideration that he had refused the ratification of the treaty, and was well aware that reproach, or even hostility, might await him at Constantinople.

Soon after these events, Ravenna capitulated, and Belisarius became its master. His fame was now at its height; but this only served to inflame the envy of his rivals at Constantinople. These, insidiously working upon the suspicious temper of Justinian, induced him to command the return of Belisarius to Constantinople. With prompt obedience, he embarked at Ravenna, carrying with him his Gothic captives and treasure. After five years of warfare, from the foot of Etna to the banks of the Po, during which he had subdued nearly the same extent of country which had been acquired by the Romans in the first five centuries from the building of that city, he arrived at Constantinople.

The voice of envy was silenced for a time, and Belisarius was appointed to the command of the army now about to proceed against the Persians. The captive monarch of the Goths was received with generous courtesy by the emperor, and an ample estate was allotted to him in Asia. Justinian gazed with admiration on the strength and beauty of the Gothic captives – their fair complexions, auburn locks, and lofty stature. A great number of these, attracted by the fame and character of Belisarius, enlisted in his guards.

In the spring of the year 540, Chosroes or Nushirvan, the

Persian king, invaded the Roman provinces in the east. The next year Belisarius proceeded against him, and took his station at Dara. Here, instead of a well-appointed army, he found only a confused and discordant mass of undisciplined men. After various operations, being baffled by the treachery or incapacity of his subalterns, he was obliged to retreat, and closed a fruitless campaign, by placing his men in winter quarters.

Being recalled to Constantinople, he went thither, but took the field early in the spring, with the most powerful army he had ever commanded. Nushirvan advanced into Syria, but, thwarted by the masterly manœuvres of Belisarius, he was at last obliged to retreat. Soon after, the Roman general being again recalled by Justinian, the most fatal disasters befel the Roman army.

During these Persian campaigns, the political security, as well as the domestic happiness of Belisarius, were shaken by the misconduct of his wife. She had long been engaged in an intrigue with Theodosius, the young soldier newly baptized as an auspicious omen in the galley of the general, upon his departure for Africa. Though told of this, Belisarius had been pacified by the protestations and artifices of Antonina; but while he was absent in Asia Minor, she, being left in Constantinople, pursued her licentious career with little scruple.

Her son Photius, a gallant young soldier, being a check upon her conduct, became the object of her hatred. While at the distance of a thousand miles, during the Persian campaign, he still experienced the malignant influence of her intrigues, and

urged by a sense of duty to his step-father, made him acquainted with his mother's depravity. When she afterwards joined her husband on the frontier, he caused her to be imprisoned, and sent Photius towards Ephesus to inflict summary punishment upon Theodosius. The latter was taken captive by Photius, and borne to Cilicia.

Antonina, by her convenient intrigues in behalf of Theodora, had laid her under great obligations, and obtained the greatest influence over her. The empress, therefore, now interfered to save her friend. Positive injunctions were sent to Cilicia, and both Photius and Theodosius were brought to Constantinople. The former was cast into a dungeon and tortured at the rack; the latter was received with distinction; but he soon expired from illness. Photius, after a third escape from prison, proceeded to Jerusalem, where he took the habit of a monk, and finally attained the rank of abbot.

Belisarius and Antonina were summoned to Constantinople, and the empress commanded the injured husband to abstain from the punishment of his wife. He obeyed this order of his sovereign. She next required a reconciliation at his hands; but he refused to comply with a demand which no sovereign had a right to make. He, therefore, remained at Constantinople, under the secret displeasure of Theodora and Justinian, who only wanted some plausible pretext to accomplish his ruin.

The invasion of Nushirvan, in the ensuing spring impelled the terrified emperor to lay aside his animosity, and restore the

hero to the direction of the eastern armies; but in this campaign, his former offence was aggravated, and the glory of saving the East was outweighed by the guilt of frankness. Justinian was recovering from a dangerous illness; a rumor of his death had reached the Roman camp, and Belisarius gave an opinion in favor of the emperor's nearest kinsman as his successor, instead of acknowledging the pretensions of Theodora to the throne. This declaration inflamed with equal anger the aspiring wife and the uxorious husband.

Buzes, the second in command, who had concurred in these views, was confined in a subterranean dungeon, so dark that the difference of day and night was never apparent to its inmate. Belisarius himself was recalled, with flattering professions of confidence and friendship, lest resentment should urge him to rebellion; but on his arrival at Constantinople, the mask was thrown aside; he was degraded from the rank of general of the East; a commission was despatched into Asia to seize his treasures; and his personal guards, who had followed his standard through so many battles, were removed from his command.

It was with mingled feelings of compassion and surprise, that the people beheld the forlorn appearance of the general as he entered Constantinople, and rode along the streets, with a small and squalid train. Proceeding to the gates of the palace, he was exposed during the whole day to the scoffs and insults of the rabble. He was received by the emperor and Theodora with angry disdain, and when he withdrew, in the evening, to his

lonely palace, he frequently turned round, expecting to see the appointed assassins advancing upon him.

In the evening, after sunset, a letter was brought him from Theodora, declaring that his life was granted and a portion of his fortune spared at the intercession of his wife, and she trusted that his future conduct would manifest his gratitude to his deliverer. The favorable moments of surprise and gratitude were improved by Antonina with her usual skill. Thus, by the artifices of two designing women, the conqueror of armies was subdued, and Belisarius once more became the duped and submissive husband.

A fine of three hundred pounds weight of gold was levied upon the property of Belisarius, and he was suffered for many months to languish in obscurity. In 544, however, he was appointed to the command of the war in Italy, whither he soon proceeded. Here, in his operations against far superior forces, he displayed the same genius as before, and in February, 547, he again entered Rome. He pursued the war with various fortune; but at last, finding his means entirely inadequate to the necessities of the contest, he begged of the emperor either reinforcements or recall. Engrossed by religious quarrels, Justinian took the easier course, and adopted the latter. Thus, after having desolated Italy with all the horrors of war for several years, he now abandoned it, from mere weakness and caprice.

Belisarius returned to Constantinople, and for several years his life affords no remarkable occurrence. He continued in the tranquil enjoyment of opulence and dignities; but, in the year

559, various warlike tribes beyond the Danube, known under the general name of Bulgarians, marched southward, and desolated several provinces by sword, fire, and plunder. Zabergan, their enterprising leader, having passed the frozen Danube in the winter, detached one portion of his army for the pillage of Greece, and the other against the capital.

So sudden and bold an aggression filled Constantinople with helpless and despairing terror. The people and the senators were agitated with fear, and the emperor sat trembling in his palace. In this general confusion and affright, all eyes were turned with hope to the conqueror of Africa and Italy. Though his constitution was broken by his military labors, his heart was alive to the call of his country, and Belisarius prepared to crown his glorious life by a last and decisive battle. He resumed his rusty armor, collected a handful of his scattered veterans, and in the return of martial spirit he seemed to shake off the weakness of decrepitude.

Sallying from the city with three hundred mounted men, he met Zabergan at the head of two thousand cavalry. Selecting a favorable position, he withstood the onset, and, seeming to recover the powers of his youth, he astonished all around him by his intrepidity and skill. After a severe and bloody struggle, the Bulgarians were driven back in the utmost disorder; four hundred fell on the field, and Zabergan himself escaped with difficulty. The whole army of barbarians, amounting to many thousands, were seized with contagious fear, raised their camp, and retreated

to the north.

Belisarius was preparing for a close pursuit, when again his enemies awaked the suspicions of Justinian by suggesting that he was aiming at popular favor with disloyal views. The enthusiastic praises of his heroic conduct, by the people, turned even the emperor's heart to jealousy, and he chose rather to purchase the departure of the barbarians by tribute, than to permit Belisarius to obtain new laurels by chastising their audacity.

From this period, Belisarius continued under the displeasure of Justinian, whose suspicious temper seemed to grow more virulent as his faculties sunk in the dotage of years. In 563, several conspiracies against the life of Justinian were detected, and under torture, some of the domestics of Belisarius accused their master of participation. This testimony, disproved by the long life and the habitually submissive loyalty of Belisarius, was sufficient for his conviction. He was stripped of his fortune, deprived of his guards, and detained as a close prisoner in his palace.

The other conspirators were condemned and executed; but, in consideration of the past services of Belisarius, the decree of death was changed for that of blindness, and his eyes were accordingly put out.³ He was now restored to liberty, but,

³ This portion of the story of Belisarius has been the subject of controversy. It has been doubted by Gibbon and other historians, whether the infliction of blindness upon Belisarius and his beggary, were not mere traditionary fables. But Lord Mahon, in his excellent life of the great Roman general from which we have drawn the preceding account, appears to have established their authenticity. The beautiful tale of Belisarius

deprived of all means of subsistence, he was compelled to beg his bread before the gates of the convent of Laurus. There he stood with a wooden platter which he held out for charity, exclaiming to the passers-by, "Give a penny to Belisarius the general!"

The affecting scene was long impressed upon the recollection of the people; and it would seem that this spectacle of persecuted merit aroused some dangerous feelings of indignation and pity, and he was, therefore, removed from public view. Belisarius was brought back to his former palace, and a portion of his treasures was allotted for his use. His death, which was doubtless hastened by the grief and hardships of his lot, occurred in 565; and Antonina, who survived him, devoted the remains of her life and fortune to the cloister.

In person, Belisarius was tall and commanding; his features regular and noble. When he appeared in the streets of Constantinople, he never failed to attract the admiration of the people. As a military leader, he was enterprising, firm, and fearless. His conception was clear, and his judgment rapid and decisive. His conquests were achieved with smaller means than any other of like extent recorded in history. He experienced reverses in the field; but never did he fail without strong and sufficient reason. His superior tactics covered his defeats, retrieved his losses, and prevented his enemies from reaping the fruits of victory. Never, even in the most desperate emergencies, was he known to lose his courage or presence of mind.

Though living in a barbarous and dissolute age, Belisarius possessed many shining virtues. In the march of his armies, he would avoid the trampling of the corn-fields, nor would he allow his soldiers even to gather apples from the trees without making payment to the villagers. After a victory, it was his first care to extend mercy and protection to the vanquished. The gift of a golden bracelet or collar rewarded any valorous achievement among his troops; the loss of a horse or weapon was immediately supplied from his private funds; the wounded ever found in him a father and a friend. To all, he was open and easy of access, and by his courteous demeanor often comforted, where he could not relieve. From his generosity, one would have deemed him rich; from his manners, poor. His private virtues promoted and confirmed the discipline of his soldiers. None ever saw him flushed with wine, nor could the charms of his fairest captives overcome his conjugal fidelity.

But the most remarkable feature in the character of Belisarius is his steadfast loyalty, and the noble magnanimity with which he overlooked the suspicious meanness and ingratitude of his sovereign. It is impossible to find in history another instance of an individual so strongly induced to rebellion by treacherous treatment or the part of his country, and the opportunity of placing a crown upon his head without the risk of effectual opposition, who refused, from patriotic motives, the double temptation.

That Belisarius had faults, is not to be denied. His blind

submission to his wife displayed great weakness, and led him into most of the errors which are charged upon his public career. In his last campaign in Italy, his wealth having been exhausted by an enormous fine, he endeavored to repair his losses by imitating the rapacity universally practised by other commanders of that period. He thus inflicted upon his memory a serious stain, and showed that, however he was exalted above the age, he was still a man. His whole career affords a striking moral, coinciding with the emphatic language of Scripture, "Put not thy trust in princes."

ATTILA, KING OF THE HUNS

This renowned barbarian was the son of Mandras, and of a royal line. He served in the army of his uncle, Roas, who was king of the Huns. At his death, in 433, he succeeded him, sharing the throne with his brother Bleda. The Huns at this period were very numerous and warlike. They extended over the southern part of Russia, and a considerable portion of the present empire of Austria. Attila's kingdom lay between the Carpathian mountains and the Danube, and was called Pannonia.

At this period, the Roman empire had been for more than a century divided into the Eastern and Western empire. Theodosius II. was now emperor of the former, and Constantinople its capital, while Valentinian III. was emperor of the latter, and Rome, or Ravenna, the seat of his government.

Both branches of the Roman empire were now sunk in the lap of luxury. They were spread over with splendid cities, and enriched with all the refinements of art, and all the spoils gathered from every quarter of the world. These offered a tempting inducement to the fierce and hungry barbarians of the north. Alaric⁴ had shown the way to Rome a few years before, and

⁴ Alaric was one of the most eminent of those northern chiefs who successively overran Italy, during the decline of the Western empire, and the first who gained possession of imperial Rome. He learned the art of war under the celebrated emperor of the East, Theodosius, who curbed the depredations of the Goths. At his death,

taught the weakness of the queen of the world. Constantinople was not likely to be an inferior or more inaccessible prize. Attila's dominions bordered upon those of the two empires, and the distance to either capital was not more than five or six hundred miles.

Among the first achievements of the two brothers, they threatened the Eastern empire with their armies, and twice compelled the weak Theodosius to purchase peace on humiliating terms. They then extended their dominions both east and west, until they reigned over the whole country from the Baltic to the Caspian Sea.

Attila was regarded by the Huns as their bravest warrior, and most skilful general. He performed such feats of valor, and success so uniformly attended his career, that the ignorant and superstitious people were inclined to think him more than mortal. He took advantage of this feeling, and pretended that he had found the sword of their tutelar god, and that with this he intended to conquer the whole earth. Being unwilling to hold a divided sceptre, he caused his brother Bleda to be murdered, and when he gave out that it was done by the command of God, the

Alaric became their leader, and overran Greece, A. D. 396. In the year 403, he entered Italy with a powerful army, but was defeated, and retired to his own country. In 410, he again entered Italy, besieged and took Rome, which he entered at midnight, and gave it up to plunder and pillage for six days. He now led his troops into the southern provinces of Italy, but died suddenly while he was besieging Cozenza. He was buried in the channel of the river Bucente, in Naples, that his remains might not be found by the Romans. To perform the burial, the water of the river was turned out of its course.

event was celebrated with the greatest demonstrations of joy.

Being now sole master of a warlike people, his ambition made him the terror of all the surrounding nations. It was a saying of his own, that no grass grew where his horse had set his foot, and the title of the "Scourge of God" was assigned to him, as characterizing his career. He extended his dominions over the whole of Germany and Scythia. The Vandals, the Ostrogoths, and a part of the Franks, acknowledged his sway, and both the Eastern and Western empires paid him tribute. Historians tell us that his army amounted to 700,000 men.

Having heard of the riches of Persia, he directed his march against it. Being defeated on the plains of Armenia, he turned back, to satisfy his desire of plunder in the dominions of the emperor of the East. Regardless of existing treaties, he laid waste the whole country from the Black Sea to the Adriatic. In three bloody engagements, he defeated the troops sent against him by Theodosius. Thrace, Macedonia, and Greece, were overrun by the savage robber, and seventy flourishing cities were utterly destroyed.

Theodosius was now at the mercy of the victor and was obliged to sue for peace. One of the servants of Attila, named Edekon, was tempted by an agent of the emperor to undertake the assassination of his master, on his return to Pannonia; but, at the moment he was about to accomplish his object, his courage failed him, he fell on his knees before Attila, confessed his criminal design, and disclosed the plot. Constantinople trembled at the

idea of Attila's revenge; but he was contented with upbraiding Theodosius, and the execution of Crisapheus, who had drawn his servant into the scheme.

Priscus, a Roman historian, who was an ambassador to Attila in the year 448, gives an interesting account of the king and his people. He found the palace in the midst of a large village. The royal edifice was entirely of wood: the houses of the Huns were also of wood, sometimes mixed with mortar made of earth. The only stone building was a set of baths. The wooden pillars of the palace were carved and polished, and the ambassador could discover some evidence of taste in the workmanship, as well as barbarous magnificence in the display of rich spoils taken from more civilized nations.

They were soon invited to a sumptuous entertainment, in which the guests were all served upon utensils of silver and gold; but a dish of plain meat was set before the king on a wooden trencher, of which he partook very sparingly. His beverage was equally simple and frugal. The rest of the company were excited into loud and frequent laughter by the fantastic extravagances of two buffoons; but Attila preserved his usually inflexible gravity. A secret agent in the embassy was charged with the disgraceful task of procuring the assassination of this formidable enemy. Attila was acquainted with this, which was the real object of the mission, but he dismissed the culprit, as well as his innocent companions, uninjured. The emperor Theodosius was compelled, however, to atone for his base attempt, by a

second embassy, loaded with magnificent presents, which the king of the Huns was prevailed upon to accept. Theodosius died not long after, and was succeeded by the more virtuous and able Marcian.

Attila was at this time collecting an enormous army, and threatened both divisions of the Roman world at once. To each emperor he sent the haughty message, "Attila, my lord and thy lord, commands thee immediately to prepare a palace for his reception!" To this insult, he added a demand upon the emperor for the remainder of the tribute due from Theodosius. Marcian's reply was in the same laconic style: "I have gold for my friends, and steel for my enemies!"

Attila determined to make war first on Valentinian. Honoria, the emperor's sister, who had been guilty of some youthful error, and was consequently confined in a convent, had sent Attila a ring, offering to become his wife. It was to claim her and half the empire as her dower, that Attila professed to be making these formidable preparations. At last, he appeared to accept the excuse of Theodosius for not allowing his sister to become his wife, and speedily marched with a prodigious force to the westward. He set out in midwinter, and did not pause till he reached the Rhine. Having defeated the Franks, he cut down whole forests to make rafts for his army to cross the river, and now, throwing off the mask, entered Gaul, a dependency of Rome.

The horrors of his march it is scarcely possible to describe.

Everything was destroyed that came in his way. Before him were terror and despair; behind, a broad track marked with desolation, ruin and death. He proceeded in his victorious career, till he reached the ancient town of Orleans. Here an obstinate defence was offered. The combined armies of Rome, under the celebrated Ætius, and the Goths under Theodoric, attacked him here, and compelled him to raise the siege. He retreated to Champaign, and waited for them in the plain of Chalons. The two armies soon approached each other.

Anxious to know the event of the coming battle, Attila consulted the sorcerers, who foretold his defeat. Though greatly alarmed, he concealed his feelings, and rode among his warriors, animating them for the impending struggle. Inflamed by his ardor, the Huns were eager for the contest. Both armies fought bravely. At length the ranks of the Romans and Gauls were broken, and Attila felt assured of victory, when, suddenly, Thorismond, son of Theodoric, swept down like an avalanche from the neighboring heights upon the Huns. He threw them into disorder, spread death through their ranks, and Attila, pressed on all sides, escaped to his camp with the utmost difficulty.

This was the bloodiest battle ever fought in Europe, for 106,000 men lay dead on the field. Theodoric was slain, and Attila, who had gathered his treasures into a heap, in order to burn himself with them in case he was reduced to extremities, was left unexpectedly to make his retreat.

Having returned to Hungary and reinforced his army, he

proceeded to repeat his demand for the hand of Honoria. He mastered the unguarded passes of the Alps, and, in 452, carried devastation into the north of Italy. At last he approached the city of Rome, when a supplicatory embassy met him, Pope Leo I. being at its head. The eloquence of the pontiff, united to prudential considerations, prevailed, and the city was saved; Attila returning to his home beyond the Danube. The Romans looked upon this preservation as a miracle, and they have preserved a legend that St. Peter and St. Paul appeared to the barbarian, and threatened him with instant death, if he did not accept the proffered terms.

Attila now soothed himself by adding the beautiful Ildico to his numerous wives, whom he wedded with all due ceremony. On this occasion he gave himself up to licentiousness, but in the morning after his marriage, he was found dead in his tent, and covered with blood, Ildico sitting veiled by his side. The story went abroad that he had burst a blood-vessel, and died in consequence, but a common suspicion is entertained that he was stabbed by his bride.

The news of Attila's death spread terror and sorrow among his army. His body was enclosed in three coffins, – the first of gold, the second of silver, and the third of iron. The captives who dug his grave were strangled, so that the place of his burial might not be known.

In person, Attila was marked with the Tartar characteristics, from which he, as well as the people of his kingdom, were

descended. He was low in stature, broad-chested, and of a powerful frame. He was dark complexioned, with a few straggling hairs for beard, a flat nose, large head, and small eyes. No one could look upon him, and not feel that he had come into the world to disturb it. The number of persons slain in his battles amounted to hundreds of thousands, yet to so little purpose, that his empire was immediately dismembered upon his death.

NERO

Claudius Cæsar Nero was son of Caius Domitius Ænobarbus and Agrippina, the daughter of Germanicus and wife of the Emperor Claudius, after the death of her first husband. He was adopted by the Emperor Claudius, A.D. 50, and when he was murdered by his wife, four years after, Nero succeeded him on the throne. He possessed excellent talents, and was carefully educated by Seneca and Burrhus. The beginning of his reign was marked by acts of the greatest kindness and condescension, by affability, complaisance and popularity. The object of his administration seemed to be the good of his people; and when he was desired to sign his name for the execution of a malefactor, he exclaimed, "I wish to heaven I could not write!" He appeared to be an enemy to flattery, and when the senate had liberally commended the wisdom of his government, Nero desired them to keep their praises till he deserved them.

But these promising virtues were soon discovered to be artificial, and Nero displayed the real propensities of his nature. He delivered himself from the sway of his mother, and at last ordered her to be assassinated. This unnatural act of barbarity shocked some of the Romans; but Nero had his devoted adherents; and when he declared that he had taken away his mother's life to save himself from ruin, the senate applauded his measures, and the people signified their approbation. Even

Burrhus and Seneca, Nero's advisers, either counselled or justified his conduct. Many of his courtiers shared the unhappy fate of Agrippina, and Nero sacrificed to his fury or caprice all such as obstructed his pleasures, or stood in the way of his inclinations.

In the night he generally sallied out from his palace, to visit the meanest taverns and the scenes of debauchery in which Rome abounded. In his nocturnal riots he was fond of insulting the people in the streets, and on one occasion, an attempt to offer violence to the wife of a Roman senator nearly cost him his life. He also turned actor, and publicly appeared on the Roman stage, in the meanest characters. He had an absurd passion to excel in music, and to conquer the disadvantages of a hoarse, rough voice, he moderated his meals, and often passed the day without eating.

The celebrity of the Olympic games having attracted his notice, he passed into Greece, and presented himself as a candidate for the public honors. He was defeated in wrestling, but the flattery of the spectators adjudged him the victory, and Nero returned to Rome with all the pomp and splendor of an eastern conqueror, drawn in the chariot of Augustus, and attended by a band of musicians, actors, and stage dancers from every part of the empire.

These private and public amusements of the emperor were comparatively innocent; his character was injured, but not the lives of the people. His conduct, however, soon became more censurable; he was guilty of various acts which cannot be even

named with decency. The cruelty of his nature was displayed in the sacrifice of his wives Octavia and Poppæa; and the celebrated writers, Seneca, Lucan, Petronius, &c., became the victims of his wantonness. The Christians did not escape his barbarity. He had heard of the burning of Troy, and as he wished to renew that dismal scene, he caused Rome to be set on fire in different places. The conflagration became soon universal, and during nine successive days the fire was unextinguished. All was desolation; nothing was heard but the lamentations of mothers whose children had perished in the flames, the groans of the dying, and the continual fall of palaces and buildings.

Nero was the only one who enjoyed the general consternation. He placed himself on a high tower and he sang on his lyre the destruction of Troy; a dreadful scene which his barbarity had realized before his eyes. He attempted to avert the public odium from his head, by a feigned commiseration of the sufferings of his subjects, and by charging the fire upon the Christians. He caused great numbers of them to be seized and put to death. Some were covered with the skins of wild beasts, and killed by dogs set upon them; others were crucified; others were smeared with pitch and burned, at night, in the imperial gardens, for the amusement of the people!

Nero began to repair the streets and the public buildings at his own expense. He built himself a celebrated palace, which he called his golden house. It was profusely adorned with gold and precious stones, and with whatever was rare and

exquisite. It contained spacious fields, artificial lakes, woods, gardens, orchards, and every device that could exhibit beauty and grandeur. The entrance to this edifice would admit a colossal image of the emperor, one hundred and twenty feet high; the galleries were each a mile long, and the whole was covered with gold. The roofs of the dining halls represented the firmament, in motion as well as in figure, and continually turned round, night and day, showering all sorts of perfumes and sweet waters. When this grand edifice, which, according to Pliny, extended all round the city, was finished, Nero said that he could now lodge like a man!

His profusion was not less remarkable in all his other actions. When he went fishing, his nets were made with gold and silk. He never appeared twice in the same garment, and when he undertook a voyage, there were thousands of servants to take care of his wardrobe. His continued debauchery, cruelty, and extravagance at last roused the resentment of the people. Many conspiracies were formed against him, but they were generally discovered, and such as were accessory, suffered the greatest punishments. One of the most dangerous plots against Nero's life was that of Piso, from which he was delivered by the confession of a slave. The conspiracy of Galba proved more successful; for the conspirator, when he was informed that his design was known to Nero, declared himself emperor. The unpopularity of Nero favored his cause; he was acknowledged by the whole Roman empire, and the senate condemned the tyrant, that sat on

the throne, to be dragged, naked, through the streets of Rome, whipped to death, and afterwards to be thrown from the Tarpeian rock, like the meanest malefactor. This, however, was not done, for Nero, by a voluntary death, prevented the execution of the sentence. He killed himself, A. D. 68, in the thirty-second year of his age, after a reign of thirteen years and eight months.

Rome was filled with acclamations at the intelligence of this event, and the citizens, more strongly to indicate their joy, wore caps such as were generally used by slaves who had received their freedom. Their vengeance was not only exercised against the statues of the deceased tyrant, but his friends were the objects of the public resentment, and many were crushed to pieces in such a violent manner, that one of the senators, amid the universal joy, said that he was afraid they should soon have cause to wish for Nero. The tyrant, as he expired, begged that his head might not be cut off from his body and exposed to the insolence of an enraged populace, but that the whole might be burned on a funeral pile. His request was granted, and his obsequies were performed with the usual ceremonies.

Though his death seemed to be the source of universal gladness, yet many of his favorites lamented his fall, and were grieved to see that their pleasures and amusements were terminated by the death of the patron of debauchery and extravagance. Even the king of Parthia sent ambassadors to Rome to condole with the Romans, and to beg that they would honor and revere the memory of Nero. His statues were also

crowned with garlands of flowers, and many believed that he was not dead, but that he would soon make his appearance and take a due vengeance upon his enemies. It will be sufficient to observe, in finishing the character of this tyrannical emperor and detestable man, that the name of *Nero* is, even now, the common designation of a barbarous and unfeeling oppressor.

LUCIUS ANNÆUS SENECA

This individual, whose "Morals" are so familiar to us, was born at Corduba, in Spain, six years before Christ. His father was a rhetorician of some celebrity, and a portion of his works has come down to our time. While Lucius was yet a child, he removed from Corduba to Rome, which henceforward became his residence. The son, possessing very promising talents, received the greatest care and attention in respect to his education. He was taught eloquence by his father, and took lessons in philosophy from the most celebrated masters. According to the custom of those who sought to excel in wisdom and knowledge, he travelled in Greece and Egypt, after completing his studies, and his work entitled *Quæstiones Naturales* showed that he made good use of his opportunities during this excursion; it also proves that he was master of the science of his time.

Young Seneca was fascinated with the philosophical speculations of the Stoics,⁵ to which sect he became devoted. He even adopted the austere modes of life they inculcated, and

⁵ The Stoics were the followers of Zeno, a Greek philosopher of Citium. They professed to prefer virtue to everything else, and to regard vice as the greatest of evils. They required an absolute command over the passions, and maintained the ability of man to attain perfection and felicity in this life. They encouraged suicide, and held that the doctrine of rewards and punishments was unnecessary to enforce virtue upon mankind.

refused to eat the flesh of animals; but when the emperor, Tiberius,⁶ threatened to punish some Jews and Egyptians for abstaining from certain meats, at the suggestion of his father, he departed from this singularity. In compliance with his father's advice, who urged upon him the necessity of devoting himself to some kind of business, he adopted the profession of an advocate.

As a pleader, Seneca appeared to great advantage, and consequently excited the envy of Caligula, who aspired to the reputation of an orator. Apprehensive of the consequences, he changed his views, and became a candidate for the honors and offices of the state. He was made prætor, under Claudius, but, being charged with a shameful intrigue with a lady of rank, he was banished to Corsica. Though his guilt was not satisfactorily proved, he continued for five years in exile; during which period he wrote a treatise on Consolation. In this, he seems to draw contentment and peace from philosophical views, and one would fancy that he was elevated by these, above the evils

⁶ Tiberius succeeded Augustus Cæsar, as emperor; at his succession he gave promise of a happy reign, but he soon disgraced himself by debauchery, cruelty, and the most flagitious excesses. It was wittily said of him by Seneca that he was never intoxicated but once, for when he became drunk, his whole life was a continued state of inebriety. He died A. D. 37, after a reign of twenty-two years, and was succeeded by Caligula. For a brief period, Rome now enjoyed prosperity and peace; but the young emperor soon became proud, cruel and corrupt. He caused a temple to be erected to himself, and had his own image set in the place of Jupiter and the other deities. He often amused himself by putting innocent people to death; he attempted to famish Rome, and even wished that the Romans had one head, that he might strike it off at a blow! At last, weary of his cruelties, several persons formed a conspiracy and murdered him, A. D. 41. History does not furnish another instance of so great a monster as Caligula.

of his condition. Yet, unhappily for his reputation in respect to consistency and sincerity, history tells us that, at this period, he was suing to the emperor in the most abject terms for restitution.

Claudius⁷ at length married Agrippina, and Seneca, being recalled, was made preceptor of Nero, the son of Agrippina, who was destined to become emperor. From the favorable traits of character displayed by the pupil of the philosopher in the early part of his career, it might seem that Seneca's instructions had exerted a good influence over him. But an impartial scrutiny of the events of that period has led to the probable conclusion that he was a pander to the worst of Nero's vices. It is certain that he acquired immense wealth in a short period of time, and it appears that this was obtained through the munificence of his royal patron. The latter was avaricious and mercenary, and was likely to part with his money only for such things as ministered to his voluptuous passions.

The possessions of Seneca were enormous. He had several gardens and villas in the country, and a magnificent palace in Rome. This was sumptuously furnished, and contained five hundred tables of cedar, with feet of ivory, and all of exquisite workmanship. His ready cash amounted to about twelve millions of dollars. It appears certain that such riches could not have been acquired by means of Seneca's precepts; and the inference of many of his contemporaries, as well as of posterity, has been,

⁷ Claudius succeeded Caligula in 41, and, after a reign of thirteen years, he was poisoned by his wife, Agrippina.

that the virtue which appears so lovely in his pages was but the decorous veil of avarice, vice, and crime.

For a period after his accession to the throne, Nero's conduct was deserving of praise; but he soon threw off all regard even to decency, and launched forth upon that career which has made his name a by-word and reproach for all after time. Seneca, being accused of having amassed immense wealth by improper means, became greatly alarmed; for he knew the tyrant so well as to foresee that, under color of this charge, he was very likely to sacrifice him, in order to obtain his property. Pretending, therefore, to be indifferent to riches, he begged the emperor to accept of his entire fortune, and permit him to spend the remainder of his days in the quiet pursuits of philosophy. The emperor, with deep dissimulation, refused this offer – no doubt intending in some other way to compass the ruin of Seneca.

Aware of his danger, the philosopher now kept himself at home for a long period, as if laboring under disease. Some time after, a conspiracy for the murder of Nero, headed by Piso, was detected. Several of the most noble of the Roman senators were concerned, and Seneca's name was mentioned as an accessory. Nero, doubtless glad of an opportunity to sacrifice him, now sent a command that he should destroy himself.

It has been a question whether Seneca was really concerned in the conspiracy of Piso. The proof brought against him was not indeed conclusive, but it is obvious that his position might lead him to desire the death of the tyrant, as the only means of safety

to himself; and Seneca's character, unfortunately, is not such as to shield his memory against strong suspicion of participation in the alleged crime.

Seneca was at table, with his wife, Paulina, and two of his friends, when the messenger of Nero arrived. He heard the words which commanded him to take his own life, with philosophic firmness, and even with apparent joy. He observed that such a mandate might long have been expected from a man who had murdered his own mother and assassinated his best friends. He wished to dispose of his possessions as he pleased, but his request was refused. When he heard this, he turned to those around who were weeping at his fate, and told them, that, since he could not leave them what he believed his own, he would leave them at least his own life for an example – an innocent conduct, which they might imitate, and by which they might acquire immortal fame.

Against their tears and wailings, he exclaimed with firmness, and asked them whether they had not learned better to withstand the attacks of fortune and the violence of tyranny. As for his wife, he attempted to calm her emotions, and when she seemed resolved to die with him, he said he was glad to have his example followed with so much constancy. Their veins were opened at the same moment; but Nero, who was partial to Paulina, ordered the blood to be stopped, and her life was thus preserved.

Seneca's veins bled but slowly, and the conversation of his dying moments was collected by his friends, and preserved among his works. To hasten his death, he drank a dose of poison,

but it had no effect, and therefore he ordered himself to be carried to a hot bath, to accelerate the operation of the draught, and to make the blood flow more freely. This was attended with no better success, and, as the soldiers were clamorous, he was carried into a stove, and suffocated by the steam. Thus he died, in the 66th year of the Christian era.

The death of Seneca has been loudly applauded, and has sometimes been pronounced sublime; but this is owing to an ignorance of the time, and inattention to Seneca's own doctrines. With the Stoics, death was nothing; "It is not an evil, but the absence of all evil." This was their creed. With such principles, there could be no fear of death, and consequently, we find that courage to die – if it be courage to encounter that which is not an evil – was common in Seneca's time. "At that period of languor and luxury," says M. Nisard, "of monstrous effeminacies, of appetites for which the world could hardly suffice – of perfumed baths, of easy and disorderly intrigues, there were daily men of all ranks, of all fortunes, of all ages, who released themselves from their evils by death. How was it possible for them to avoid suicide, with no other consolation than the philosophy of Seneca, and his theories on the delights of poverty?"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.