

Spurius Oppius also, one of the colleagues of Claudius in the decemvirate, underwent a similar fate. His tyranny had been insupportable. In a freak of passion, without any extenuating cause, he had ordered an old and distinguished soldier to be cruelly scourged. The other decemvirs, intimidated by this severity, fled from Rome, losing all their property by confiscation.

The patricians were now prostrate, and the good-natured people began to pity them. This animated the hopes of the patricians, and assisted by those of the people who favored their cause, they renewed the struggle which had already continued through many ages. The aristocracy again developed unanticipated strength, and took a firm stand in the attempt to prevent the new constitution from going into effect. The commons retaliated by saying:

"If you patricians will not have the constitution, we will at least keep matters as they now are. We have two consuls whom we can implicitly trust. We have ten true and zealous tribunes, the leaders of our late glorious deliverance. We will retain these, and then the patricians can gain but little by their opposition."

46, that it was the general opinion that Claudius was assassinated in prison by order of the tribunes.

CHAPTER III.

CONFLICTS AT HOME AND WARS ABROAD.

FROM 433 B. C. TO 318 B. C.

POWER OF AN ARISTOCRACY.—DEMANDS OF THE PLEBEIANS.—STRUGGLE OF THE PATRICIANS AGAINST POPULAR RIGHTS.—THE OFFICE OF CENSOR.—ITS DESPOTISM.—INVASION OF THE GAULS.—DEFEAT OF THE ROMAN ARMY.—SACK OF ROME.—SIEGE OF THE CAPITOL.—TERMS OF PEACE.—MANLIUS.—HIS PHILANTHROPY AND CONDEMNATION.—DESPOTISM OF CAMILLUS.—CONQUEST OF THE PRIVERNATIANS.—WAR WITH THE SAMNITES.—DISASTER AT THE CAUDINE FORKS.—MAGNANIMITY OF PONTIUS.—CHARACTERISTIC ROMAN PRIDE AND HEROISM.

THE inherent strength of an aristocracy, so long as it retains any of its pristine vigor, is ever found to be one of the most formidable instruments of government, and one of the most impregnable barriers to the advance of popular enlightenment. The sagacious few can only hold the many in subjection by keeping them in ignorance. One man, who has clear vision, can easily dominate over an hundred, if he can but succeed in plucking out their eyes. By skill and cunning the patricians succeeded in placing their own men in the consulate, and in setting aside the popular constitution. Affairs speedily returned to their old state, and the two orders of patricians and plebeians were rendered more distinct and antagonistic than ever before. The plebeians were again exposed to violence and insult. Haughty and dissolute young nobles, organized in clubs, supported one another in their outrages. The commons complained bitterly, but they found no man adequate to act as their leader in breasting the encroachments of a powerful aristocracy. The patricians ever rallied with entire unanimity in support of the assumptions of their party, and so great was the strength of unity of action, the

lous. Still Neibhur, with skill and sagacity never surpassed, has drawn out a general outline of the conflicts, which convey all the information upon that subject which it is now possible to attain. The Æquians and Volscians had long been the most formidable foes of Rome, and they often at this time carried their plundering conquests up even to the walls of the city.

The whole majestic valley of the Po, spreading out between the Alps and the Apennines, constituting, in loveliness of scenery, salubrity of climate, and fertility of soil, one of the most favored regions upon the surface of our globe, was, at this period, occupied by the Etruscans, Ligurians, and Umbrians, wealthy, powerful, and warlike nations. Of these remote regions of the north, Rome, struggling against her immediate neighbors, knew but little. About four hundred years before Christ, immense bands of wild, savage men, shaggy, and almost as brutal as bears and wolves, came pouring down from France, then called Gaul,* through the passes of the Alps, and with victorious arms overran the valley of the Po, and planted themselves upon the banks of its beautiful waters. Gradually pressing onward in their conquests they approached Rome, menacing the city with subjugation and destruction.

These Gauls, with an army seventy thousand strong, devastating the whole region through which they passed, were rapidly descending the Italian peninsula. The Romans, informed of their approach, in great alarm raised forty thousand troops, many of whom were raw recruits, crossed the Tiber to the right bank, and marched to meet the foe. But the Gauls had crossed the river in its upper branches, and were moving down the left bank. The Roman generals, when apprised of this, were thrown into the greatest consternation. For many miles above Rome the Tiber was not fordable, and at that time there were no bridges, and boats could not be obtained for the

* According to Livy, v. 34, 35, it was 387 years before Christ that the Gauls in vast numbers crossed both the Alps and the Apennines. There can, however, but little reliance be placed in these remote traditions.

transportation of so large a force. The Roman territory did not then extend more than fifty miles from the city in any direction, and in the north its limits were very narrow.

The Roman army hastened by forced marches back to the city, crossed the river without a moment's delay, and had advanced but twelve miles from Rome up the left bank when they met the Gauls, elated with success, pressing forward, eager for carnage, conflagration, and plunder. Upon the precipitous banks of the Alia, a small stream emptying into the Tiber, the Romans awaited their foes. The Gauls, in overpowering numbers, with hideous yells rushed upon them. After a short conflict the Romans were everywhere routed. Many, in the midst of a scene of awful carnage, plunged into the Tiber, and endeavored to swim to the opposite shore. But the Gauls overwhelmed them with their javelins, and nearly the whole army was destroyed. A few breathless, bleeding fugitives reached the city, conveying tidings of the awful disaster. The city was now defenseless. This decisive battle was fought the 18th of July, 390 years before Christ.

The Gauls passed the night after their victory in cutting off the heads of the slain, to convey them to their homes as household ornaments and lasting memorials of their valor. The next day, like wolves who had already lapped blood, they came rushing upon Rome. The citizens fled in all directions, taking with them such of their effects as they could easily remove. A picked band of soldiers was, however, thrown into the citadel to defend it to the last extremity. When the Gauls forced the gates and entered the city they found the streets nearly empty. They immediately spread themselves in all directions, plundering and destroying. The mass of the Romans had escaped to Veii, a city on the western bank of the Tiber, some fifteen miles from Rome. A number of old men, of venerable character and senatorial rank, unable to aid in the defense of the citadel, and deeming it beneath their dignity to seek safety in flight, met together and took a solemn oath by

which they devoted themselves to death for the honor of their country. Arraying themselves in their senatorial or sacerdotal robes, gorgeously embroidered, according to the custom of the times, they took their seats, each on his ivory chair of magistracy, in the gateway of his house.

The Gauls were alarmed at the aspect of these venerable men, arrayed in splendor such as they had never seen, and they doubted whether they beheld mortals or whether the gods had descended for the defense of the city. One of the barbarians cautiously drew near M. Papirius, and began reverently to stroke his long, white beard. The Roman noble, indignant at such familiarity, nearly cracked the skull of the Gaul by a blow with his ivory scepter. The Gaul instantly cut him down with his sword. This was the signal for a general massacre, and all the old men were speedily slain.

The barbarians now turned their attention to the citadel on the Capitoline hill. The immense rock rose then from the plain and the Tiber's banks in a precipitous cliff, accessible but by one path. By this approach the Gauls attempted to storm the fortress, but were repulsed with much slaughter. They then blockaded the hill, and, while endeavoring to starve the garrison to surrender, spread their devastations through all the surrounding region. Thus weeks passed away, while the Gauls were plundering and destroying far and wide; extending their conquests even into the present territory of Naples.

In the meantime the Romans who had taken refuge at Veii, began to recover a little from their consternation and to organize in preparation to attack the foe. The city of Veii was on the right bank of the Tiber, some fifteen miles, as we have before stated, above Rome, which city was then almost entirely on the left bank of the river. A heroic young man, Pontius Cominius, wishing to open communication between the garrison in Rome and the troops which were being organized at Veii, by night floated down the Tiber, and succeed-

ed in ascending the precipitous cliff of the Capitoline hill, by digging footholes in the soil and grasping the bushes which sprung up here and there along the face of the ascent. He was successful in this perilous adventure, and returning by the way in which he came, regained Veii in safety.

In the morning the Gauls saw evidence that some one had clambered up the face of the precipice, and they resolved, by the same path to make an assault. The spot was not guarded, for it had been deemed inaccessible. At midnight, in profound silence, a picked band of the Gauls commenced climbing the cliff. So noiseless was their approach that even the watchdogs in the Roman camp gave no alarm. Upon the summit of the hill there were three temples reared to the guardian gods of Rome—Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva. In the temple of Juno some geese were kept, which were deemed sacred to that goddess. As the story goes, these geese, by some instinct, perceived the approach of danger, and began to flap their wings and to cackle. A Roman officer, M. Manlius, aroused by their unusual agitation, sprang up, called his comrades, and ran out to ascertain the cause of the alarm.

At that moment he saw the head of a Gaul just rising above the brow of the precipice. Rushing upon him he dashed the rim of his shield into his face and plunged him headlong down the cliff. As the savage fell, he swept down others, who were behind him in his path, and the Romans, crowding to the brow of the hill and hurling down missiles of every kind, easily repulsed the foe with great slaughter. For six or seven months the blockade was continued, and yet there seemed to be no prospect of starving out the garrison. Autumnal fevers raged in the camp of the besiegers, and decimated their ranks. News also arrived that the Venetians were overrunning the territory in Etruria, which the Gauls had conquered, and were establishing themselves in power there. The Gauls, under these circumstances, were anxious for some excuse to raise the siege and retire. The Romans, also humiliated and beggared,

were solicitous for peace on almost any terms. Famine was staring them in the face, for their provisions were nearly consumed, and they knew not where to look for more.

Both parties being thus eager to terminate the strife, and neither being conscious of the desperate condition of the other, terms of peace were easily agreed upon. The Romans offered a large sum of money to the Gauls if they would retire. Promptly the unexpected offer was accepted; and the barbarians assuming an air of triumph, waved their banners, and with shouts and trumpet peals prepared to raise the siege.

A thousand pounds weight of gold according to the story, was to be paid. As the barbaric chieftain was weighing the treasure, the Roman commissioner, Q. Sulpicius, complained that the weights were not fair. The Gaul haughtily threw his massive broadsword upon the heavily laden scale which the gold was to lift.

"And what do you mean by that?" inquired Sulpicius.

"*Væ victis esse*,"* proudly answered the Gaul.

Rome was subdued, and there was no remedy but to submit to the wrong. Laden with plunder the Gauls returned across the Apennines. The Romans were so humiliated in view of this defeat, that after issuing innumerable versions of the story, each of which redounded less and less to their shame, they at last settled down upon the entirely apocryphal narrative, that while the gold was being weighed out the Roman army from Veii approached, under Camillus, attacked the Gauls at the sword's point, recovered the ransom, and put every individual of them to death, so that not one was left to carry to his countrymen the tidings of the unparalleled slaughter. This is but a specimen of the boastful stories with which the Romans of a more modern date, garnished the sepulchers of their fathers.

The evidence is, however, conclusive that the Gauls retired with their plunder, leaving Rome, and much of the surround-

* Anglice,—“To the victors belong the spoils.”

ing region, an entire desolation. As the fugitive Romans returned from Veii they were so much dejected in view of the smoldering ruins of their city—for the torch of the Gaul had consumed every thing that fire would burn—that they seriously contemplated abandoning the site entirely, and taking up their residence at Veii. After much deliberation, it was decided to remain at Rome; and vigorously the reconstruction of the city was commenced. But the Romans were now so weakened in power and diminished in numbers, that they were incessantly attacked by marauding bands from neighboring semi-barbaric tribes and nations. It was probably this which led them to adopt the wise policy of incorporating, as citizens, emigrants from every quarter, and to establish a very generous policy in the administration of the government, giving to every head of a family a farm of about seven acres,* and allowing stone to be quarried, and timber to be felled freely, from any of the public lands for purposes of building.

At one time the Volscians came upon the city in such numbers that the Romans were blockaded, and, as usual in every hour of peril, appointed a dictator. Camillus, who was thus invested with unlimited power, ordered every man into the field who was capable of bearing arms. In a midnight march they emerged from the walls, fell upon the Volscians in the darkness of the earliest dawn, attacked them in front and rear, and cut them down in merciless carnage. The victors were wiping their bloody swords when they heard that another army was approaching Rome, on the right bank of the river. Camillus allowed his troops not a moment for rest, but traversing the intermediate space with apparently tireless sinews, met the Etruscan foe, intoxicated and disorganized in the plunder of Sutrium, a city which they had just captured. His conquering legions swept the streets crowded with the riotous bacchanals, speedily regaining the city, and the Etruscans mis-

* *Jugera*; a piece of ground 240 feet in length by 120 feet in breadth.