



Hagia Sophia (1850).

JUSTINIAN THE GREAT

Emperor from 527-565 A.D.

I

In the time of Clovis the country now called Bulgaria was inhabited by Goths. One day a poor shepherd boy, about sixteen years of age, left his mountain home in that country to go to the city of Constantinople, which was many miles away. The boy had no money to pay the expenses of the journey, but he was determined to go, even though he should have to walk every step of the road and live on fruits that he could gather by the way. He was a bright, clever boy who had spent his life hitherto in a village, but was now eager to go out into the world to seek his fortune.

Some years before, this boy's uncle, who was named Justin, had gone to Constantinople and joined the Roman army. He was so brave and so good a soldier that he soon came to be commander of the imperial guard which attended the emperor.

The poor shepherd boy had heard of the success of his uncle, and this was the reason he resolved to set off for the big city. So he started down the mountain and trudged along the valley in high hope, feeling certain that he would reach the end of his journey in safety. It was a difficult and dangerous journey, and it took him several weeks, for he had to go through dark forests and cross rivers and high hills. But at last, one afternoon in midsummer

he walked through the main gate of Constantinople, proud and happy that he had accomplished his purpose.

He had no trouble in finding his uncle Justin, for everybody in Constantinople knew the commander of the emperor's guards. And when the boy appeared at the great man's house and told who he was, his uncle received him with much kindness. He took him into his own family and gave him the best education that could be had in the city.

As the boy was very talented and eager for knowledge, he soon became an excellent scholar. He grew up a tall, good-looking man, with black eyes and curly hair, and he was always richly dressed. He was well-liked at the emperor's court and was respected by everybody on account of his learning.

II

One day a great change came for both uncle and nephew. The emperor died and the people chose Justin to succeed him. He took the title of Justinus I (Jus-ti'-nus) and so the young scholar, who had once been a poor shepherd boy, was now nephew of an emperor.

After some years Justinus was advised by his nobles to take the young man, who had adopted the name of Justinian, to help

him in ruling the empire. Justinus agreed to this proposal, for he was now old and in feeble health and not able himself to attend to the important affairs of government. He therefore called the great lords of his court together, and in their presence he placed a crown on the head of his nephew, who thus became joint emperor with his uncle. The uncle died only a few months later, and Justinian was then declared emperor. This was in the year 527. Justinian reigned for nearly forty years and did so many important things that he was afterwards called Justinian the Great.

He had many wars during his reign, but he himself did not take part in them. He was not experienced as a soldier, for he had spent most of his time in study. He was fortunate enough, however, to have two great generals to lead his armies. One of them was named Belisarius and the other Narses.

Belisarius was one of the greatest soldiers that ever lived. He gained wonderful victories for Justinian and conquered some of the old Roman provinces that had been lost for many years.

The victories of these two generals largely helped to make the reign of Justinian remarkable in history. Many years before he ascended the throne, the Vandals conquered the northern part of Africa and established a kingdom there with Carthage as its capital. The Vandal king in the time of Justinian was named Gelimer (Gel'-i-mer) and he lived in Carthage.

Justinian resolved to make war on this king in order to recover Northern Africa and make it once again a part of the Empire. So Belisarius was sent to Africa with an army of thirty-five thousand men and five thousand horses that were carried on a fleet of six hundred ships. It took this fleet three months to make the voyage from



Belisarius at Ravenna.

Constantinople to Africa. Today, the same voyage may now be made in just a few days. But in the time of Belisarius there were no steamships, and nothing was known of the power of steam for moving machinery. The ships or galleys were sailing vessels. When there was no wind, they could make no progress except by rowing.

When Belisarius reached Africa, he left five men as a guard in each vessel, and with the rest of his army he marched for some days along the coast. The people received him in a friendly way, for they had grown tired of the rule of the Vandals and preferred to be under the government of the Romans.

About ten miles from Carthage, Belisarius met a large army led by the brother of Gelimer. A battle immediately took place, and the Vandals were utterly defeated. Gelimer's brother was killed, and the king himself, who had followed with another army and joined the fight, was also defeated and fled from the field. Belisarius then proceeded to Carthage and took possession of the city.

Soon afterwards Gelimer collected another army and fought the Romans in another battle twenty miles from Carthage, but Belisarius again defeated him, and the Vandal king again fled. This was the end of the Vandal king in Africa. In a short time Gelimer gave himself up to Belisarius, who took him to Constantinople. Justinian set apart an estate for him to live upon, and the conquered king passed the rest of his life in peaceful retirement.

After conquering the Vandals, Justinian resolved to conquer Italy, then held by the Ostrogoths. A large army was put together and placed under the command of Belisarius and Narses, who immediately set out for Italy. When they arrived there they marched straight to Rome and, after

some fighting, took possession of the city. But in a few months, Vitiges (vit'-i-ges), king of the Goths, appeared with an army before the gates and challenged Belisarius and Narses to come out and fight.

The Roman generals, however, were not then ready to fight, and so the Ostrogoth king laid siege to the city, thinking that he would compel the Romans to surrender.

But instead of having any thought of surrender, Belisarius was preparing his men for fight. When they were ready, he attacked Vitiges and defeated him. Vitiges retired to Ravenna; Belisarius quickly followed and made such an assault on the city that it was compelled to surrender. The Ostrogoth army was captured, and Vitiges was taken to Constantinople as a prisoner.

Belisarius and Narses then went to Northern Italy and, after a long war, conquered all the tribes there. Thus the power of Justinian was established throughout the whole country, and the city of Rome was again under the dominion of a Roman emperor.

While his brave generals were winning these victories for the Empire, Justinian himself was busy in making improvements of various kinds at the capital. He erected great public buildings that were not only useful but ornamental to the city. The most remarkable of them was the very magnificent cathedral of St. Sophia (So-phi'-a), for a long time the grandest church structure in the world. The great temple still exists in all its beauty and grandeur, but is now used as a mosque.

The most important thing that Justinian did—the work for which he is most celebrated—was the improving and collecting of the laws. He made many excellent new laws and reformed many of the old laws, making him famous as one



Mosaics of Justinian (above) and Theodora (below).

of the greatest of the world's legislators. For a long time the Roman laws had been difficult to understand. There was a vast number of them, and there was great disagreement as to what the laws really were and what they meant. Justinian employed a great lawyer named Tribonian (trib-o'-ni-an) to collect and simplify the principal laws. The collection which he made was called the *Code of Justinian*. It still exists and is the model according to which

most of the countries of Europe have made their laws.

Justinian also did a great deal of good by establishing a number of manufactures in Constantinople. It was he who first brought silk-worms into Europe.

To the last year of his life, Justinian was strong and active and a hard worker. He often worked or studied all day and all night without eating or sleeping. He died in 565 at the age of eighty-three.



Mosaics in Hagia Sophia.