

# **THE STORY OF EUROPE**

**FROM THE FALL OF THE ROMAN  
EMPIRE TO THE REFORMATION**



# **THE STORY OF EUROPE**

**FROM THE FALL OF THE ROMAN  
EMPIRE TO THE REFORMATION**

**BY**

**H. E. MARSHALL**

*CONTAINING TWELVE MAPS*

**YESTERDAY'S CLASSICS**

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## PREFACE

MANY European histories written for school use are too long for careful study by young pupils during the necessarily limited time allotted to the subject. Many of them are overloaded with details of battles and domestic politics which, although of importance in the thorough study of one country, have little or no influence on the general growth of Europe. It is very important that students should realize as early as possible that the history of our islands has at all times been influenced by the broader movements of European history, and in this book an endeavour has been made to give, succinctly, the main factors which have gone to the forming and developing of the various European states from the fall of the Roman Empire to the Reformation, together with sufficient detail to enliven that dullness which is the almost inevitable accompaniment of great compression.

As a good deal of time is generally devoted to the history of England in the ordinary school curriculum, it has seemed unnecessary to enlarge on it here. The history of England has therefore rarely been touched upon save when (as in the Hundred Years' War, for example) that country plays a prominent part in the politics of Europe. On the other hand, considerable space has been given to the period immediately following on the fall of the

Roman Empire, that being a period somewhat neglected, but which yet gives the necessary key to future developments.

To aid smooth reading the dates have been for the most part relegated to the margin. In the case of rulers the dates of the beginning and end of their reign have been given; of all other personages those of birth and death.

# CHAPTER I

## THE BARBARIANS INVADE THE ROMAN EMPIRE

IN the first centuries of our era the one great power of the world was Rome. All southern Europe bowed beneath the conquering sword of the Romans. Africa and Asia, too, owned their sway. For the Mediterranean, the great trade route of the then known world, was theirs, and the countries bordering upon it became mere provinces of Rome. Even the uttermost islands felt their might, and sailing beyond the "narrow seas," Cæsar set his hand upon the island of Britain. From the Rhine and the Danube in the north, to the desert of Sahara in the south, from the borders of Wales in the west, to the Euphrates and the Tigris in the east, the empire stretched.

Of this wide empire Rome was the capital. Secure upon her seven hills she sat, mistress of the world, a city without rival, until in A.D. 330 the Christian emperor Constantine the Great resolved to build a new Rome upon the shores of the Bosphorus. Constantine called his new city New Rome. But men did not take readily to the name, and the capital

A.D.  
330

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upon the Bosphorus became known as Constantinople, or the city of Constantine. It is difficult to-day to remember that Constantinople was founded by a Christian, and was at one time the bulwark of Christianity against the Turk.

The Romans called themselves lords of the world. And so it seemed they were. All the trade and skill, all the art and learning of the known world, were theirs. Beyond the borders of the Roman Empire the world was given over to wild barbarians, who were skilled neither in the arts of war nor of peace. That the civilization of Rome should go down before their ignorance seemed impossible. Yet the barbarian triumphed, Rome fell, and the mighty empire crumbled into dust.

“Rome was not built in a day,” neither did Rome fall in a day. The fall was gradual, and came both from without and from within.

It came because there was tyranny in Rome, and no state can long be held by tyranny and the power of the sword alone. The high officials and tax collectors cared nothing for the people’s good, they cared only for gold. They laid heavy and unjust taxes upon the middle classes. These classes must always be the backbone and support of a nation, but in Rome’s last days they were so oppressed that they ceased to exist. The backbone of the nation was gone. So when wild barbarian hordes poured over the borders of the empire Rome fell.

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When the Emperor Theodosius died, about sixty years after the founding of Constantinople, he

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left two sons, both mere boys. They divided the empire between them, Arcadius, the elder, taking Constantinople for his capital, ruled over the Eastern Empire, and Honorius, a child of eleven, became ruler of the Western Empire, with Rome as his capital. It was upon Rome and the Western Empire that the full force of the barbarian onslaught fell.

First came the Goths. These were Teutons or Germans, and were divided into two tribes, the Visigoths or west Goths, and the Ostrogoths or east Goths. They were tall and strong, their eyes were blue, their hair long and fair. They were lawless, greedy, and treacherous. They came at first fleeing from the Huns, a far more barbarous foe, seeking shelter beneath the still all-powerful sceptre of Rome. They found the protection they desired, but ere long they turned their swords against the men who had provided it.

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## **The March of Alaric**

Under their young king Alaric, the Visigoths attacked the empire again and again. Twice Alaric laid siege to Rome. Twice he spared the imperial city. Still a third time he came, and this time he sacked and plundered it without mercy. Then, laden with rich booty, driving a long train of captives before him, he turned southward. The proudest city in the world lay at his feet, and flushed with victory, he marched to invade Africa.

410

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But an even greater captain than the conqueror of Rome met him on the way. Death laid his hand upon the victorious Goth, and all his triumphs were blotted out. The new king of the Goths, Ataulphus son of the Wolf, did not follow up Alaric's triumphs. He turned aside from Africa, forsook the wasted plains of Italy, and marching his war-worn followers into southern Gaul and northern Spain, settled there.

414

Meanwhile other barbarian hosts attacked the outposts of the empire. For in a vain endeavour to guard Italy and Rome itself the last legions had been called back even from Britain, and the northern boundaries of the empire were left a prey to the barbarians.

Over the wall which stretched from Forth to Clyde stormed the Picts and Scots, across the Rhine and the Danube poured wild hordes of Franks, Burgundians, Lombards, Allemanni, and Vandals. The Franks settled in Gaul, and made it Frankland. The Burgundians, too, settled in Gaul, and to-day the fair province of France lying between the Loire and the Saône still keeps their name. The Vandals settled in Spain, of which a province is still named Andalusia (Vandalusia). The Lombards, or Longbeards, overran northern Italy, and to-day the central province of northern Italy is still named Lombardy. Angles and Saxons left their homes on the Weser and the Elbe, sailed across the sea, and taking possession of southern Britain, changed its name to England.

## *THE BARBARIANS INVADE THE ROMAN EMPIRE*

Every one of those barbarian tribes which thus rent the Roman empire to pieces was of German or Teutonic origin. And from the ashes of fallen Rome a new Teutonic empire was to arise. But meanwhile a foe far more fierce and terrible than any German tribe, was sweeping onward ready to grind to dust the already crumbling empire. This foe was the Hun.

### **Attila and the Huns**

The Huns were a warrior race coming from out the wastes of Asia. They were small and swarthy, their eyes were dark and piercing, their noses squat, and their hairless, hideous faces were covered with frightful gashes and scars which made them more hideous still. They spent their lives on horseback, and rode so well that they almost seemed part of their sturdy little ponies. With much riding, indeed, their legs were so bowed that they could scarcely walk. They had no houses, and few possessions. They neither ploughed nor reaped, but lived on raw flesh and clothed themselves in skins. They were fierce, blood-thirsty, vile, and all men fled before them with a shuddering dread.

These were the people who, now led on by their mighty king, Attila, made Europe tremble. Of all the Huns Attila was the most terrible. Though small of stature, his shoulders were of great breadth, and there was something of kingly authority in his

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piercing, evil eye and loathsome, scowling face. Where he passed he left desolation behind him, and gloried in it. "I am the curse of God," he boasted proudly, "the hammer of the world. Where my horse's hoofs have trod the grass will grow no more."

451 Like a devastating flood the Huns swept over Gaul, leaving behind them a track of blood and ashes. Town after town was given to the flames, and the fair fields were laid waste. Then, at length, forgetting their old quarrels, Roman and Goth joined to crush the common foe. The Goths, under King Theodoric, and the Romans under Aëtius, "the last of the Romans," marched northward. Franks and Burgundians, too, joined the army, and upon a plain near Chalons a great battle was fought between the allies and the Hun.

The struggle was long and fierce. Theodoric, king of the Visigoths, was slain, but in the end the Huns were defeated. Defeated they were, but not crushed. Like a wounded animal behind the rampart of his baggage wagons, Attila crouched, growling and watchful. So dangerous he seemed that the allies dared no more attack him, and content with their victory, they marched homeward.

This fight has been called the battle of the Nations. And although the victory was not a decisive one, a great question was settled upon the field of Chalons. There it was made plain that Europe was to be the heritage of the Christian Teutons and Romans, and not of the pagan Mongols.

Attila was too crippled to renew the fight, and sullenly he recrossed the Rhine. But the following year, having gathered another army, he marched through Italy, leaving, as was his wont, a trail of ruined cities and devastated plains in his wake. Rome was his goal, but ere he reached it his course was once more stayed. For, accompanied by certain nobles, the pope, Leo I, came out to meet the savage conqueror.

Upon the banks of the River Mincio the misshapen heathen met the priest of God. Upon the one side there was religion and knowledge and everything that stood for civilization, discipline, and lofty aims. Upon the other there was ignorance, licence, and base lust of blood.

Leo came unarmed to meet the foe before whom all Europe cowered. Yet he conquered. His solemn words of pleading and warning pierced the heart of the fierce heathen. Perhaps, too, the gold which he brought in his hand as a bribe from the feeble emperor aided not a little the eloquence of his words. However that may be, Attila yielded. "Hastily," we are told, "he put off his habitual fury, turned back on the way he had come, and departed with the promise of peace."

"I can conquer men," he said, "but the Lion (Leo) knows how to conquer me."

In this appeal made by Leo the Great to a heathen foe we see the first beginnings of the enormous power in worldly matters which the popes of a future day were to wield. But other arguments

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besides those of the bishop of Rome hastened Attila's going. For "the Huns were stricken by the blows of heaven," famine and pestilence thinned their ranks. So, taking the gold which was offered to him, their leader returned, perhaps not unwillingly, to his own borders. He hoped doubtless to come again at another time to wreak his will upon Rome. But the following year he died. His empire fell to pieces, and the Hun vanished from Europe.

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## CHAPTER II

# THE RISE OF THE FRANKS

IN the beginning of the fifth century the Franks were among the many tribes of Teutonic origin who helped to dismember the Roman Empire. They took possession of part of Gaul, which, in time, became known as Frankland, and which formed the nucleus of the state which we know to-day as France. When the Franks invaded the Empire they did so in a manner different from that of the other Teutons. They did not cut themselves off from Germany. They did not wander far into the Empire, making conquests now here, now there. They simply crossed the border, and taking possession of a small portion, settled there.

Nor were they like the Goths and Vandals a single people who marched to war in a body. They were made up of various tribes who moved about independently of each other and who settled in various places. Their great strength lay in the fact that they kept their line of communication open. While plundering the Empire they still kept in touch with the great unexploited forces of the heathen world behind them.

## *THE RISE OF THE FRANKS*

The chief of these Frankish tribes were the Salians and the Riparians, who settled in what is now Belgium. And it was the Salian Franks which at length became the dominant tribe. Their first king of any account was Clovis. He traced his descent from a mythical sea-king called Merovée, and from that the dynasty to which he belonged is called the Merovingian dynasty.

Clovis came to the throne at the age of sixteen. He soon set out upon a career of conquest, and in no long time doubled and trebled his kingdom.

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At the time of their invasion of the Empire nearly all the Teutonic tribes were Christian. But they were Arian Christians—that is, they were followers of Arius, whose doctrine, to put it simply, was a sort of early Unitarianism. It was easier for the uneducated Teutons to understand this doctrine than the more complicated one of the Trinity, and therefore they adopted it.

## **Arianism**

Arianism has long since passed away, and it may not seem to matter very much what those half-civilized tribes believed. But in the reconstruction of Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire it had some importance. For the fact that the Teutons were Arians made for them an enemy in the Bishop of Rome, who was gradually becoming a power in temporal as well as in spiritual matters.

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But although most of the barbarians who attacked the Empire were Christian, some were not. Among those who were not were the Angles and the Saxons, who took possession of England, and the Franks.

Clovis, like the people over whom he ruled, was a heathen, but he married a Christian princess, Clotilda, the niece of the King of Burgundy. And this Clotilda was not an Arian like her uncle, but a Catholic. She was very devout, and she tried very earnestly to convert her heathen husband. But Clovis resisted all her efforts. He allowed her undisturbed to follow her own religion, but he was satisfied with his own gods, and refused to change. At last, however, Clotilda had her wish.

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Clovis was fighting against the Allemanni, and in the Battle of Tolbiac his soldiers were being beaten. Fervently he called upon his heathen gods to save him, and turn the fortune of the day in his favour. His prayers were in vain, and the Franks fled before the foe. Then, in the agony of defeat, Clovis prayed to Clotilda's God.

“Jesus Christ,” he cried, “whom Clotilda declares to be the only true God, aid me. If Thou wilt grant me victory over mine enemies I will believe in Thee, and will be baptized in Thy name. I have called upon my own gods and they have not helped me. To Thee alone I pray.”

As Clovis so prayed the tide of battle turned, and when night fell the victory was his, and the enemy fled in all directions. Returning home, the

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king loyally kept his word. The water of baptism was sprinkled upon him, his forehead received the sign of the Cross, and henceforth he was a Christian. Nor was Clovis alone in his baptism. With him three hundred of his followers accepted the Christian faith.

This sudden and wholesale conversion made little difference in the lives of Clovis and his tameless warriors. After, as before, they were blood-thirsty barbarians. But much of the king's future success was due to his conversion. For it brought him a powerful friend in the Church of Rome, and when he conquered the Arian kings of the Visigoths and the Burgundians, the great prelates looked upon him as a champion of the Church, and regarded his wars as holy wars. Thus began an alliance between the popes and the kings of France which, in days to come, had great influence upon the history of western Europe.

Even the emperor in far-off Constantinople honoured Clovis. Instead of regarding him as a barbarian enemy, assisting at the destruction of the Empire, he looked upon him as an ally, and gave him the title of Roman Consul. It was but an empty title, and added nothing to the reality of the Frankish king's conquests, but it pleased his barbaric mind.

Clovis reigned for thirty years. At the beginning of his reign he had been merely the chief of a petty tribe. When he died he was ruler of a vast kingdom stretching from beyond the Rhine to the Pyrenees. "For each day," says an old writer, "the

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enemies of Clovis fell beneath his hand, and his kingdom was augmented, because with a pure heart he walked before the Lord, and did that which was right in His eyes.”

## **CHAPTER III**

# **THE BARBARIANS RULE IN ROME**

ROME had been saved from the Hun (see Chapter I) only to fall into the hands of another barbarian foe. From Andalusia the Vandals had crossed the Straits of Gibraltar, overrun the northern shores of Africa, and, under their savage king, Gaiseric, made themselves complete masters of that Roman province. Up and down the Mediterranean they sailed in their pirate ships, plundering the rich and fruitful islands, causing peaceful traders to tremble and flee before them. Their sole joy was in plunder and bloodshed, and they cared not where they went in quest of it.

## **The Vandals: The March of Gaiseric**

“I sail to the cities of men with whom God is angry,” said Gaiseric. And from his actions it would appear that he thought God was angry with all who

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crossed his path. So, having robbed and wasted many a fair city of the Mediterranean, Gaiseric and his Vandals one day appeared before Rome. The emperor and the people fled, and the walls were left defenceless. But as the Vandals advanced the gates were thrown open. It was, however, no armed force which issued forth, but a company of priests.

Once again Leo sought to save the imperial city. Unarmed save by his dauntless courage, with the Cross carried before him, and his clergy following after, he advanced to meet the foe. But this time he could not altogether prevail. The Vandals were bent on booty. Booty they would have. Leo could only wring from their chief a promise that there should be no bloodshed, no burning of houses, no torture of the defenceless. With that he was fain to be content, and the sack of Rome began.

For fourteen days the pillage lasted. Then, having stripped the city of its treasures, the robbers sailed away in their richly laden galleys, carrying with them thousands of Roman citizens as slaves.

The Western Empire was now almost entirely in the hands of the Teutonic tribes which had overrun its borders. But still, for twenty-one years, it lingered on in death. Then the end came.

The last emperor of Rome bore the same name as its founder—Romulus. He was, however, only a feeble, beautiful boy of fourteen, so he was called Romulus Augustulus or the Little Emperor. He was deposed by Odoacer the German, who was the first barbarian to sit upon the throne of the

Cæsars. Odoacer, however, did not take to himself the title of emperor. For the Roman Empire in the east still existed, a Roman emperor still reigned in Constantinople. To this emperor then, Odoacer sent the purple robe and the royal diadem, with a letter, in which he declared that one emperor was enough both for East and West, and demanding the right to rule in Italy as patrician or king.

## **Theodoric and the Ostrogoths**

At first, when the emperor, Zeno, received Odoacer's letter he was merely angry that this bold barbarian had dared to usurp the throne of the Cæsars. Then he felt rather pleased at the idea of being sole emperor. So he left Odoacer alone, and for thirteen years he reaped the reward of his boldness, and ruled Rome in peace. Then another barbarian, Theodoric the Ostrogoth, turned his eyes on Italy. He desired to conquer it, and the emperor did nothing to restrain him. For Theodoric and his Goths were dangerous friends and troublesome neighbours, and it seemed better to the emperor that they should harass the Western Empire, over which he had but a shadowy right, than that they should turn their swords against him.

So once again a great barbarian force marched on Italy. This time they came not as an army but as a nation, bringing their wives, and children and household goods with them. For the Goths had heard

much of the beauty and the riches of Rome, and they meant to abide there. Odoacer, however, did not lightly yield what his sword had won, and for more than four years he fought for his kingdom. At length, however, even his stubborn will gave way, and at Ravenna he surrendered to Theodoric.

Theodoric promised Odoacer his life, promised even that he should rule with equal power with himself. But he did not keep his promise, for he well knew that two kings could not rule in Italy, and secretly he resolved to put Odoacer to death.

Ten days, therefore, after Theodoric had entered Ravenna in triumph he invited his fallen rival to a feast. As Odoacer neared the banqueting hall two men suddenly threw themselves at his feet, praying him to grant them a boon. In the fervour of their entreaties they seized his hands and held them fast. As they did so armed men, in the midst of whom was Theodoric, drawn sword in hand, surrounded them. Too well Odoacer knew that his last hour had come. "O God," he cried, "where art Thou?"

He spoke no more. For Theodoric's sword descended, cleaving his helpless enemy from neck to thigh. Even Theodoric himself was amazed at the blow. "Methinks the catiff had never a bone in his body!" he cried, with a savage laugh, as he turned away.

Thus Theodoric the Goth began his reign in Italy, and save this one black deed of treachery there is little to record against him in his reign of more than thirty years. He was a barbarian, but with the

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conquest of Italy he stayed his sword, seeking no further conquests, but only the good of the conquered people.

He had no easy task, for he had two utterly different peoples to rule over, Romans and Goths. He was just, however, and wise, and soon he was loved by both peoples. He preserved many of the old Roman laws, and although he was so ignorant himself that he could only with difficulty trace his own name, he encouraged learning in others. He made friendly alliances with all the peoples around him, and so that these should be lasting and binding he arranged marriages between his own family and those of the neighbouring princes, thus taking a precaution of which the world has not yet learned the uselessness and danger.

Theodoric, indeed, seems to have been for these early days a model prince. He was, we are told, "A lover of manufactures, and a great restorer of cities. . . . Merchants from other countries flocked to his dominions. For so great was the order which he made there that if any one left gold or silver at his farm it was as safe as if it had been within a walled city. This is proved by the fact that he never made gates for any city in Italy, and those which were there already were never closed."

It seemed as if Theodoric had founded a new dynasty in Italy, under which those two races, from which the modern civilization of Europe was to spring, would be united. But that was not to be. After a reign of nearly thirty-three years he died,

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leaving his kingdom to the rule of a woman and a child, and all the miseries attendant.

## CHAPTER IV

# THE RISE AND FALL OF JUSTINIAN'S EMPIRE—THE ROLE OF THE EASTERN EMPIRE

THE year after Theodoric died Justinian, one of the greatest rulers of the Eastern Empire, came to power. He was not content with merely ruling over the Eastern Empire, but, like the Cæsars before him, he had dreams of a world dominion, and he longed to gather under his sceptre all the lands which had at one time owned Roman sway. He had great generals at his command to help him to realize his dream, among them Belisarius, at this time a brave and splendid youth.

527-  
565

505?-  
565

## Belisarius and Narses

About this time the Vandals were quarrelling among themselves, and it seemed to Justinian a good opportunity to win Africa again for the Empire. So

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with a great army Belisarius set out. In a campaign of three months he conquered the Vandals. Then, laden with rich spoil, and carrying the captive Vandal king, Gelimer, with him, he returned again to Constantinople in triumph.

Italy, too, was at this time in a state of unrest. Here again Justinian saw his opportunity, and again Belisarius set forth to subdue a rebel province of the Empire. But to conquer the Goths was by no means an easy matter. The war raged for years, and before he could bring it to a victorious close the jealousy of his rivals caused Belisarius to be recalled.

Two years later he returned to Italy. But he was, he says himself, "destitute of all the necessary implements of war—men, horses, arms, and money." And the emperor, still listening to the envious whisperers, was deaf to his appeals. So the war lingered on, until at length Belisarius was again recalled, and his place taken by Narses, another of Justinian's great generals.

Narses was no young and splendid hero like Belisarius, but a little dried-up old man. He was, however, the most brilliant strategist of the day, and he received the support denied to Belisarius. His so-called Roman army was indeed merely a conglomeration of Greeks and wild barbarians, but with it he swept victoriously through Italy.

It was not far from the ancient city of Pompeii that the Goths made their last stand. Their king, Teias, stood in the forefront of the battle. In his right hand he held a mighty spear, and with unerring

aim he dealt death this way and that. Although arrows and javelins fell thick and fast about him, he heeded them not. Yet so many found their mark, and remained fast embedded in his shield that, at length, even his mighty arm could not bear the weight.

So calling to his squire he bade him bring another shield. The squire obeyed. But for one moment, in changing one shield for another, the king's side was unprotected. In that moment a javelin was sped, and, pierced to the heart, Teias fell dying to the ground. With a wild shout of exultation the foe rushed forward, and cutting off his head, placed it upon a spear, and carried it in triumph through their ranks.

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Thus died the last king of the Goths. Yet although leaderless now, his men still fought on, and only night and darkness put an end to the strife. Day dawned and it was renewed, but the struggle now was hopeless, and at length the Goths sued for peace. This Narses readily granted, giving the conquered people the choice between remaining in Italy as the subjects of Justinian or of departing thence.

The Goths chose to depart. And with their women and children and household goods they slowly crossed the Alps. They went who knows where? From that time the Ostrogoths vanish from history.

But the campaign in Italy was not yet over. For the Franks and Allemanni had poured like a torrent over the Alps into the plain of Italy, vowing to

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restore the Gothic kingdom. But these, too, Narses defeated, and only a scattered remnant reached home. Then at length the harassed, exhausted land had rest, and for the next twelve years Narses ruled over it as governor for the emperor.

Justinian also attacked the Visigoths in Spain, and brought all the south and east of that country under Roman rule once more. So much of the old Roman Empire, indeed, did he reconquer that it seemed as if his dream might come true. But in 565 he died, and almost at once fresh hordes of barbarians overran his newly acquired provinces. The Lombards invaded Italy, the Visigoths rose and expelled the Romans from Spain, Slavs and Avars, wild peoples akin to the Huns, streamed over the Balkans, while Persians, in a war which lasted twenty years, devastated the eastern boundaries of the Empire. Arabs made themselves masters of Egypt and Roman Africa, until at length the Eastern Empire included little more than the countries now forming Greece, the Balkan States, and Asia Minor.

It is not, therefore, for his conquests that we remember Justinian. For his conquests soon vanished away, and all through the ages he has been remembered not as a conqueror but as a lawgiver. His great work was the codification of the whole body of Roman law. Upon the so-called laws of Justinian the laws of nearly every civilized country are founded to this day. That is his title to greatness.

It must be remembered, too, that although after the time of Justinian the dimensions of the

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Empire became small indeed, in comparison to those of the Roman Empire in the days of its strength, it was no mean role that this shrunken Empire played in the development of Europe; for it formed a Christian bulwark against the attacks of the heathen hordes of Asia. While the new Teutonic kingdoms were being formed it was the Romans and not the Teutons who defended Europe from the danger coming from the east.

And besides being a barrier the Eastern Empire was a storehouse of art and literature. For the new Teutonic nations which overran the Western Empire were only half civilized, or not civilized at all. Before them the learning and the art of old Rome went down. It would have been lost to the world had it not been kept alive in Constantinople. There, too, in this time of flux the trade and commerce of Europe centred, and when in course of time the new Teutonic kingdoms settled down, and the peoples awakened to the need of learning and of art, it was to Constantinople that they turned to find them.

But however useful a part the Empire played in the development of Europe the old imperial splendour was gone. New Rome was not mistress of the world, but rather its handmaid. And as the old imperial idea changed the character of the Empire changed too. It was no longer Roman in any sense, but Greek. Greek became the language of State, and even the later laws of Justinian were written in that language. So although legally the continuance of the Roman Empire, it has come to be called the Greek Empire or the Byzantine Empire, from the name of

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the ancient city of Byzantium, upon the site of which Constantinople was built.

## CHAPTER V

# GREGORY THE GREAT LAYS THE FOUNDATION OF PAPAL POWER

## Lombards in Italy

THE Lombards or Longbeards, so called either because of their long axes or long beards, invaded Italy less than three years after the death of Justinian. They were a terrible people, “a race fierce with more than the ordinary fierceness of the Germans.” They fought for the mere love of bloodshed and destruction. They had not even the beginnings of art and learning when they swarmed over Italy, and they brought nothing with them save savagery and a cruel love of slaughter.

The name of their king at this time was Albion, and with his brutish host he quickly overran all the north of the peninsula, made Pavia his capital, and called himself Lord of Italy. In no long time, however, Albion was murdered by his own people. His successor also was murdered. Then for ten years there followed a “kingless time,” during which

568

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thirty-six barbarian dukes oppressed the unhappy land.

Soon the whole peninsula was theirs save Ravenna, Rome, Naples, Venice, and a few other coast towns with the territory round them. All Italy was still in name part of the Eastern Empire, and an exarch ruled in Ravenna in the name of the emperor. But he could give little help to the rest of Italy against the Lombards, for he had scarce troops enough to defend Ravenna itself.

Justin II 565  
Tiberius II 578  
Maurice 582

Now again and again in their misery the Romans sent messengers to Constantinople, praying the emperors who succeeded Justinian to grant them aid. But they prayed in vain. The emperors were busy with their wars against the Persians and the Avars, enemies at their gates. To them Constantinople was the heart of the Empire, Italy but an outlying province, for which it was not well to sacrifice safety at home.

540-604

Such was the state of Italy when, in 590, much against his will, Gregory I became pope. "For my sins," he writes, "I find myself bishop, not of the Romans but of the Lombards, men whose promises stab like swords, and whose kindness is bitter punishment."

573

In his youth Gregory had been a brilliant man of the world, and had been made prefect of the city, an office which entitled him to wear the imperial purple. We may picture him, young and handsome, dashing through the streets of Rome in a gilded chariot, while the populace bow before him, or clad

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in robes of purple presiding at the Senate, or in the courts of justice. But amidst this splendour Gregory felt the call of religion. Suddenly he broke off his brilliant career, devoted all his fortune to the founding of convents and monasteries, and himself became a monk.

But Gregory had a true genius for business, and his great abilities could not be altogether hid beneath the humble garb of a monk. He soon became an abbot, and at length the supreme office of pope was thrust upon him. As pope he showed himself to be a great pastor and great statesman. His love for, and pride in, Rome was unbounded. To him there was no question but that Rome was the city of the world, and that the bishop of Rome was by divine right the head of the Church. And by insisting on that right he laid the foundations of the absolute spiritual power which future popes were to enjoy.

590

## **The Temporal Power of the Papacy**

He also laid the foundations of their temporal power. This was not so much sought by him as forced upon him by circumstances. His appeals for help against the Lombards were disregarded both by the exarch of Ravenna and by the emperor. He saw then that he must either take to himself regal power or suffer the oppression of the Lombards. He chose

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the former, and boldly took the reins of government into his own hands. He carried on the war against the Lombards, he gave orders to generals, he appointed governors, and did not hesitate to declare that his rank was higher than that of the exarch, even although the latter was the representative of the emperor. Finally he made peace on his own account with one of the Lombard chiefs.

This roused the Emperor Maurice to wrath, and he called Gregory in so many words a disloyal, presumptuous fool. He could, or would, do nothing himself to relieve his distressed province, but neither would he recognize the act of another which seemed to usurp his imperial authority, and he refused to ratify the peace. Only after years had passed could he be brought to own that the Lombards had come to stay, and see the impossibility of ousting them without strong measures. For strong measures he was not prepared, and at length a general peace was signed.

Peace brought added work to Gregory both in Church and State. For now that his messengers could travel safely through Italy he made rebellious or lax clergy feel his authority, rousing them to zeal or bringing them back to obedience. He settled disputes over boundaries, and arbitrated in many ways between Lombards and Romans. Now, too, he carried out his long cherished plan and sent St. Augustine to convert the heathen Angles of England.

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Gregory's days and nights were full, his manifold labours leaving him scant rest. Yet all this work in Church and state, at home and abroad, was carried on by a man in constant pain, so ill indeed that for weeks at a time he could not leave his bed. "I live in such misery and pain," he writes, "that I grieve to see the light of returning day. My only comfort is in the hope of death." Or again, "I die daily, yet never die."

Before many years had passed his labours for peace seemed to be brought to naught by the folly of the exarch. War broke out again and ended in further triumphs for the Lombards. Yet from this time dates a more settled state in the affairs of Italy. The peace was often disturbed, often broken, but on the whole it was maintained, or renewed, from year to year. Still, for nearly two hundred years this obscure and savage Teuton race held sway over the fair lands of Italy which to-day still bear the name of Lombardy.

Meanwhile the great prelate drew near his end. A moment of peace had come to his beloved land when peace came to him too, and death set him free from his labours and his pains. He was not as men count years an aged man, but he was worn out by his great labours and great suffering. He left his mark not only on his own times but on times to come. For he had advanced the Roman see to a far higher position than it had ever before attained, and for good or ill had laid the foundations of the temporal power of the popes.

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