Medieval Europe

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MEDIEVAL EUROPE

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MEDIEVAL EUROPE

INTRODUCTION

All divisions of history into periods are artificial in proportion as they are precise. In history there is, strictly speaking, no end and no beginning. Each event is the product of an infinite series of causes, the starting-point of an infinite series of effects. Language and thought, government and manners, transform themselves by imperceptible degrees; with the result that every age is an age of transition, not fully intelligible unless regarded as the child of a past and the parent of a future. Even so the species of the animal and vegetable kingdoms shade off one into another until, if we only observe the marginal cases, we are inclined to doubt whether the species is more than a figment of the mind. Yet the biologist is prepared to defend the idea of species; and in like manner the historian holds that the distinction between one phase of culture and another is real enough to justify, and, indeed, to demand, the use of distinguishing names. In the development of single communities and groups of communities there occurs now and again a moment of equilibrium, when institutions are stable and adapted to the needs of those who live under them; when the minds of men are filled with ideas which they find completely satisfying; when the statesman, the artist, and the poet feel that they are best fulfilling their several missions if they express in deed and work and language the aspirations common to the whole society. Then for a while man appears to be the master of his fate; and then the prevailing temper is one of reasoned optimism, of noble exaltation, of content allied with hope. The spectator feels that he is face to face with the maturity of a social system and a creed. These moments are rare indeed; but it is for the sake of understanding them that we read history. All the rest of human fortunes is in the nature of an introduction or an epilogue. Now by a period of history we mean the tract of years in which this balance of harmonious activities, this reconciliation of the real with the ideal, is in course of preparing, is actually subsisting, and is vanishing away.

Such a period were the Middle Ages--the centuries that separate the ancient from the modern world. They were something more than centuries of transition, though the genius of a Gibbon has represented them as a long night of ignorance and force, only redeemed from utter squalor by some lingering rays of ancient culture. It is true that they began with an involuntary secession from the power which represented, in the fifth century, the wisdom of Greece and the majesty of Rome; and that they ended with a jubilant return to the Promised Land of ancient art and literature. But the interval had been no mere sojourning in Egypt. The scholars of the Renaissance destroyed as much as they created. They overthrew one civilisation to clear the ground for another. It was imperative that the old canons of thought and conduct should be reconsidered. The time comes in the history of all half-truths when they form the great obstacles to the pursuit of truth. But this should not prevent us from recognising the value of the half-truth as a guide to those who first discover it; nor should we fall into the error, common to all reformers, of supposing that they comprehend the whole when they assert the importance of the neglected half. Erasmus had reason on his side; but so, too, had Aquinas. Luther was in his rough way a prophet; but St. Bernard also had a message for humanity.

Medieval culture was imperfect, was restricted to a narrow circle of

superior minds, offered no satisfaction to some of the higher faculties and instincts. Measure it, however, by the memories and the achievements that it has bequeathed to the modern world, and it will be found not unworthy to rank with those of earlier and later Golden Ages. It flourished in the midst of rude surroundings, fierce passions, and material ambitions. The volcanic fires of primitive human nature smouldered near the surface of medieval life; the events chronicled in medieval history are too often those of sordid and relentless strife, of religious persecutions, of crimes and conquests mendaciously excused by the affectation of a moral aim. The truth is that every civilisation has a seamy side, which it is easy to expose and to denounce. We should not, however, judge an age by its crimes and scandals. We do not think of the Athenians solely or chiefly as the people who turned against Pericles, who tried to enslave Sicily, who executed Socrates. We appraise them rather by their most heroic exploits and their most enduring work. We must apply the same test to the medieval nations; we must judge of them by their philosophy and law, by their poetry and architecture, by the examples that they afford of statesmanship and saintship. In these fields we shall not find that we are dealing with the spasmodic and irreflective heroisms which illuminate a barbarous age. The highest medieval achievements are the fruit of deep reflection, of persevering and concentrated effort, of a self forgetting self in the service of humanity and God. In other words, they spring from the soil, and have ripened in the atmosphere, of a civilised society.

I

THE FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Medieval history begins with the dissolution of the Western Empire, with the abandonment of the Latin world to German conquerors. Of the provinces affected by the catastrophe the youngest was Britain; and even Britain had then been Roman soil for more than three hundred years. For Italy, Spain, and Gaul, the change of masters meant the atrophy of institutions which, at first reluctantly accepted, had come by lapse of time to be accepted as part of the natural order. Large tracts of Europe lay outside the evacuated provinces; for the Romans never entered Ireland or Scandinavia or Russia, and had failed to subjugate Scotland and the greater part of modern Germany. But the Romanised provinces long remained the dominant force in European history; the hearth-fire of medieval culture was kindled on the ruins of the Empire. How far the victorious Teuton borrowed from the conquered provincial is a question still debated; the degree and the nature of Rome's influence on the new rulers varied in every province, indeed in different parts of the same province. The fact of the debt remains, suggesting a doubt whether in this case it was indeed the fittest who survived. The flaws in a social order which has collapsed under the stress of adverse fortunes are painfully apparent. It is natural to speak of the final overthrow as the judgment of heaven or the verdict of events. But it has still to be proved that war is an unfailing test of worth; we have banished the judicial combat from our law courts, and we should be rash in assuming that a process obviously absurd when applied to the disputes of individuals ought to determine the judgments of history on nationalities or empires.

The immediate and obvious causes which ruined the Western Empire were military and political--the shortcomings of a professional army and professional administrators. If asked whether these shortcomings were symptomatic of evils more generally diffused through other ranks and classes of society, we must go deeper in the analysis of facts. No _a priori_ answer would be satisfactory.

The beginning and the end of the disaster were successful raids on Italy. Alaric and his Visigoths (401-410 A.D.) shattered the prestige and destroyed the efficiency of the government which ruled in the name of the feeble Honorius. The Ostrogoths under Theodoric destroyed the last simulacrum of an imperial power rooted in Italy (489-493 A.D.). After Theodoric had vanquished Odoacer, it was clear that the western provinces would not again acknowledge an Emperor acclaimed at Ravenna; although the chance remained that they might be reconquered and reorganised from Constantinople. This chance disappeared when the Lombards crossed the Alps (568 A.D.) and descended on the Po valley. From first to last Italy was the key to the West. And these successive shocks to imperial power in Italy were all due to one cause. All three of the invading hordes came from the Danube. The Roman bank of the great river was inadequately garrisoned, and a mistaken policy had colonised the Danubian provinces with Teutonic peoples, none the less dangerous for being the nominal allies (_foederati_) of the Empire. The Visigothic raids, which were in fact decisive, succeeded because the military defences of the Western Empire were already strained to breaking-point; and because the Roman armies were not only outnumbered, but also paralysed by the jealousies of rival statesmen, and divided by the mutinies of generals aspiring to the purple. The initial disasters were irreparable, because the whole machine of Roman officialdom came to a standstill when the guiding hand of Ravenna failed. Hitherto dependent on Italy, the other provinces were now like limbs amputated from the trunk. Here and there a local leader raised the standard of resistance to the barbarians. But a large proportion of the provincials made peace on the best terms they could obtain. Such are the essential facts.

Evidently the original error of the Romans was the undue extension of their power. This was recognised by no less a statesman than Augustus, the founder of the Empire; but even in his time it was too late to sound a retreat; he could only register a protest against further annexations. Embracing the whole of the Mediterranean littoral and a large part of the territories to the south, east, and north, the Empire was encumbered with three land frontiers of enormous length. Two of these, the European and the Asiatic, were perpetual sources of anxiety, and called for separate military establishments. That neither might be neglected in the interest of the other it was reasonable to put the imperial power in commission between two colleagues. Diocletian (284-305 A.D.) was the first to adopt this plan; from his time projects of partition were in the air and would have been more regularly carried out, had not experience shown that partitions led naturally to civil wars between rival Emperors. In 395, on the death of the great Theodosius, the hazardous expedient was given a last trial. His youthful sons, Arcadius and Honorius, were allowed to divide the Empire; but the line of partition was drawn with more regard to racial jealousies than military considerations. It extended from the middle Danube (near Belgrade) to a point near Durazzo on the Adriatic coast, and thence to the Gulf of Sidra. East of this line lay the sphere of Greek civilisation, the provinces which looked to Alexandria and Antioch and Constantinople as their natural capitals. West of it the prevailing language was Latin, and the higher classes of society modelled themselves upon the Italian

aristocracy.

Founded upon a principle which appeals to our modern respect for nationality, this partition only gave a legal form to a schism which had been long in preparation. But in one respect it was disastrous. The defence of the Danube frontier was divided between the two governments; and that of the East, rating the impoverished Balkan peninsula as of secondary importance, and envisaging the problem from a wholly selfish point of view, left unguarded the great highways leading from the Danube into Italy. Stilicho, the great general who administered the West in the name of Honorius, ventured to meet this danger by intervening in the peninsula, and even in the political intrigues of Constantinople. He only succeeded in winning a precarious alliance with the Visigoths and the permanent ill-will of the Eastern Empire. He was left to deal single-handed with the first invaders of Italy; and the estrangement of the two imperial courts persisted after his untimely fall. The Western Empire, betrayed by the one possible ally, collapsed under the strain of simultaneous attacks along the whole line of the European frontier.

It has been alleged that the Roman armies were neither so robust nor so well disciplined in the fifth century as they had been in an earlier age. However this may be, they could still give a good account of themselves when matched on equal terms with the most warlike of the barbarians. It was in patriotism and in numbers, rather than in professional efficiency, that they failed when put to the supreme test.

The armies were now largely recruited with barbarians, who numbered more than half the fighting strength and were esteemed the flower of the Roman soldiery. Many of these hirelings showed an open contempt for their employers, and sympathised with the enemies whom they were paid to fight. Furthermore, each army, whatever its constituent elements, tended to be a hereditary caste, with a strong corporate spirit, respecting no authority but that of the general. The soldiers had no civic interests; but they had standing grievances against the Empire. Any political crisis suggested to them the idea of a mutiny led by the general, sometimes to obtain arrears of pay and donatives, sometimes to put their nominee upon the throne. The evil was an old one, dating from the latter days of the Republic, when Marius, in the interests of efficiency, had made military service a profession. But it was aggravated under the successors of Diocletian, as the barbarian element in the armies increased and the Roman element diminished. Its worst effects appeared in the years 406-407. The German inroads upon Italy and Gaul were then followed by the proclamation of military usurpers in Britain and on the Rhine; the Roman West was divided by civil war at the very moment when union was supremely important. Hence the strange spectacle of the Visigoths, still laden with the spoils of Rome, entering Gaul by invitation of the Empire to fight against imperial armies.

The problem of numbers had been earlier recognised, but not more adequately met. Diocletian is said to have quadrupled the armies, and in the fourth century they were far larger than they had been under Julius and Augustus; Constantine had revised the scheme of frontier-defence to secure the greatest possible economy of men. Still, under Honorius, we find that one vital point could only be defended by withdrawing troops from another. The difficulty of increasing the numbers was twofold. First, the army was mercenary, and taxation was already strained to the point of diminishing returns. Secondly, it was difficult to raise recruits among the provincials. The old principle of universal service had been abandoned by Valentinian I (364-375); and although compulsory

levies were still made from certain classes, the Government had thought fit to prohibit the enlistment of those who contributed most to taxation. Every citizen was legally liable for the defence of local strongholds; but the use of arms was so unfamiliar, the idea of military service as a national duty was so far forgotten, that Stilicho, when the barbarians were actually in Italy, preferred the desperate measure of enlisting slaves to the obvious resource of a general call to arms.
We find ourselves here confronted with a social malady which was more than an economic weakness. The Empire was, no doubt, a complex and expensive form of government superimposed upon a society which stood at a rudimentary stage of economic development. Barbarous methods of taxation and corrupt practices among the ruling classes had aggravated the burden to such a degree that the municipalities of the provinces were bankrupt, and the middle-class capitalist was taxed out of existence. For this and other reasons the population of the older provinces was stationary or declining. But there was still much wealth in the Empire; and the great landowners of the provinces could raise considerable armies among their dependants when they saw fit to do so. The real evil was a moral evil, the decay of civic virtue.

We do not mean that the ethics of private life had deteriorated from the standard of the past. This is incredible when we remember that Christianity was now the all but universal religion of the Empire; for Christianity, at its worst and weakest, laid more stress upon ethical duties, in the narrower sense, than any of the older religions. The provincial was a more moral being than the Goth or the Vandal. It is a mere superstition that every victorious race is chaste and frugal, just and law-abiding; or that ill success in the struggle for existence is a symptom of the contrary vices. In many respects the Greeks who submitted to Philip and Alexander were morally superior to the victors of Salamis and Plataea. Private and political morality may spring from the same root; but the one has often flourished where the other has been stunted. Perhaps this is only natural. Human nature seldom develops equally in all directions. Men who are intensely concerned with the right ordering of their relations to neighbours, friends and family, may well forget the larger community in which their private circle is contained. The Roman provincial had exceptional excuses for remaining indifferent to a state which claimed his loyalty, not in the name of nationality or religion, but in that of reason and the common good. Loyalty for him could only be an intellectual conviction. But, unless he could enter the privileged ranks of the army or the higher civil service, he had no opportunities of studying, still less of helping to decide, the questions of policy and administration with which his welfare was closely though indirectly linked. Political ideas only came before the private citizen under the garb of literature. The most admired authors only taught him to regret republican polities long out of date. The antiquarian enthusiasms which he acquired by his studies were in no way corrected by the experience of daily life. If a townsman, he was legally prohibited from changing his residence and even from travelling about the Empire, for fear that he might evade the tax-collector. If a rural landowner, he lived in a community which was economically self-sufficient, and consequently provincial to the last degree. The types of character which developed under such conditions were not wanting in amiable or admirable traits. The well-to-do provincial was often a scholar, a connoisseur in art and literature, a polished letter-writer and conversationalist, a shrewd observer of his little world, an exemplary husband and father, courteous to inferiors, warm-hearted to his friends. Sometimes he found in religion or philosophy an antidote to the pettiness of daily life, and was roused

into rebellion against the materialism of his equals, the greed and the injustice of his rulers. But he despaired of bridging the gulf between the Empire, as he saw it, and the ideal commonwealth--City of God or Republic of the Universe--which his teachers held up to him as the goal of human aspirations. Rather he was inclined, like the just man of Plato, to seek the nearest shelter, to veil his head, and to wait patiently till the storm of violence and wrong should pass away.

It is hard to condemn such conduct when we remember the appalling contrast between the weakness of the individual and the strength of a social order coextensive with civilisation itself. But in this spirit of reasonable submission to a state of things which appeared fundamentally unreasonable, in this conviction that the bad could not be bettered by reforms of detail, there was more danger to society than in the crass indifference of the selfish and the unreflecting. When the natural leaders of society avow that they despair of the future, fatalism spreads like a contagious blight among the rank and file, until even discontent is numbed into silence. Nor does the evil end here. The idealists pay for their contempt of the real, not merely with their fortunes and their lives, but, worse still, with their intellectual patrimony. Just as a government deteriorates when it is no longer tested by continual reference to principles of justice, so a Utopia, however magnificent, fades from the mind of the believer when he ceases to revise it by comparison with facts, when it is no longer a reply to the problems suggested by workaday experience. Life and theory being once divorced, the theorist becomes a vendor of commonplaces, and the plain man is fortified in his conviction that he must take life as he finds it.

This analysis helps us to understand why the Western Empire, on the eve of dissolution, had already assumed the appearance of a semi-barbarian state. In those districts which had been lately settled with Teutonic colonists the phenomenon may be explained as resulting from over-sanguine attempts to civilise an intractable stock. But even in the heart of the oldest provinces the conditions were little better. Law and custom had conspired to sap the ideas and principles that we regard as essentially Roman. The civil was now subjected to the military power. The authority of the state was impaired by the growth of private jurisdictions and defied by the quasi-feudal retinues of the great. For civic equality had been substituted an irrational system of class-privileges and class-burdens. Law was ceasing to be the orderly development of general principles, and was becoming an accumulation of ill-considered, inconsistent edicts. So far had decay advanced through the negligence of those most vitally concerned that, if Europe was ever to learn again the highest lessons which Rome had existed to teach, the first step must be to sweep away the hybrid government which still claimed allegiance in the name of Rome. The provincials of the fifth century possessed the writings in which those lessons were recorded, but possessed them only as symbols of an unintelligible past. A long training in new schools of thought, under new forms of government, was necessary before the European mind could again be brought into touch with the old Roman spirit.

The great service that the barbarians rendered was a service of destruction. In doing so they prepared the way for a return to the past. Their first efforts in reconstruction were also valuable, since the difficulty of the work and the clumsiness of the product revived the respect of men for the superior skill of Rome. In the end the barbarians succeeded in that branch of constructive statesmanship where Rome had

failed most signally. The new states which they founded were smaller and feebler than the Western Empire, but furnished new opportunities for the development of individuality, and made it possible to endow citizenship with active functions and moral responsibilities. That these states laboured under manifold defects was obvious to those who made them and lived under them. The ideal of the world-wide Empire, maintaining universal peace and the brotherhood of men, continued to haunt the imagination of the Middle Ages as a lost possibility. But in this case, as so often, what passed for a memory was in truth an aspiration; and Europe was advancing towards a higher form of unity than that which had been destroyed.

II

THE BARBARIAN KINGDOMS

The barbarian states which arose on the ruins of the Western Empire were founded, under widely different circumstances of time and place, by tribes and federations of tribes drawn from every part of Germany. We expect to find, and we do find, infinite varieties of detail in their laws, their social distinctions, their methods of government. But from a broader point of view they may be grouped in two classes, not according to affinities of race, but according to their relations with the social order which they had invaded.

[Illustration: The Barbarian Kingdoms and Frankish Empire]

One group of kingdoms was founded under cover of a legal fiction; the Visigoths, the Ostrogoths, and the Burgundians claimed to be the allies of the Empire. At one time or another they obtained the recognition of Constantinople for their settlements. Their kings accepted or usurped the titles of imperial administrators, stamped their coins with the effigies of the reigning Emperor, dated their proclamations by the names of the consuls for the year, and in many other ways flaunted their nominal subjection as the legal basis of their actual sovereignty. This fiction did not prevent them from governing their new dominions in true Teutonic fashion, through royal bailiffs, who administered the state demesnes, and military officers (dukes, counts, etc.) who ruled with autocratic sway over administrative districts. Nor did the most lenient of them hesitate to provide for their armies by wholesale confiscations; the ordinary rule was to take from the great proprietor one-third or two-thirds of his estate for the benefit of the Teutonic immigrant. Further, we have ample evidence that the provincials found existence considerably more precarious under the new order. The rich were exposed to the malice of the false informer and the venal judge; the cultivators of the soil were often oppressed and often reduced from partial freedom to absolute slavery. Yet in some respects the invaders of this type were tolerant and adaptable. They left to the provincials the civil law of Rome, and even codified it to guard against unauthorised innovations; the _Lex Romana Burgundionum_ and the Visigothic _Breviarium Alarici_ are still extant as memorials of this policy. They realised the necessity of compelling barbarians and provincials alike to respect the elementary rights of person and property; Theodoric the Ostrogoth and Gundobad the Burgundian were the authors of new criminal codes, in the one case mainly, in the other partially, derived from Roman

jurisprudence. Such rulers were not content with professing an impartial regard for both classes of their subjects; they frequently raised the better-class provincials to posts of responsibility and confidence. By a singular fatality the chief races of this group had embraced the Arian heresy, which was repudiated and detested by their subjects. Yet their great statesmen uniformly extended toleration to the rival creed, and even patronised the orthodox bishops, by whom they were secretly regarded as worse than the lowest of the heathen. This generosity was little more than common prudence. Numerically the conquerors were much inferior to the provincials; economically they had everything to lose by needless ill-treatment of those whom they exploited. But the best of them had studied the organisation of the Empire at close quarters, sometimes as captains in the imperial service, sometimes as neighbours of flourishing provinces in the years preceding the grand catastrophe; and knowledge rarely failed to produce in them some respect or even enthusiasm for the _Respublica Romana_. "When I was young," said King Athaulf the Visigoth, "I desired to obliterate the Roman name and to bring under the sway of the Goths all that once belonged to the Romans. But I learned better by experience. The Goths were licentious barbarians who would obey no laws; and to deprive the commonwealth of laws would have been a crime. So for my part I chose the glory of restoring the Roman name to its old estate." To such men the ideal of the future was a federation of states owing a nominal allegiance to the official head of the Empire, but cherishing an effective loyalty to all that was best in Roman law and culture.

The second group comprises the kingdoms which were founded in outlying provinces or comparatively late in time. The invaders of England, the Franks in Northern Gaul, the Alemanni and the Bavarians on the Upper Rhine and the Danube, the Lombards in Italy, the Vandals in Africa, never came completely under the spell of the past. The Vandals might have done so, but for their fanatical devotion to Arianism; for the province of Africa, in which they settled, was one of those which Roman statesmanship had most completely civilised. The Franks might have imitated the Visigoths and the Burgundians, if fortune had laid the cradle of their power in the valley of the Loire or the Rhone instead of the forests and marshes of the Netherlands. The Lombards and the Saxons showed no innate aversion to the ways and works of Rome; but they entered upon provinces which had already been impoverished and depopulated by the scourge of war. Such races proceeded rapidly with the construction of a new social and political order, because the past was a sealed book to them. Roman law vanished from England so completely as to leave it doubtful whether the Saxons ever came to terms with the provincials; it was tolerated but not encouraged by the Franks; it was in great measure set aside by the Lombards; it seems to have been unknown to the Alemanni and Bavarians. We shall see in the sequel the importance of these facts. The future of Europe lay not with the Goths or with the Burgundians, but with more ignorant or less impressionable races who, rather by good fortune than by choice, escaped the vices in missing the lessons of Roman civilisation. The Franks and the Saxons, as we find them described by Gregory of Tours and the Venerable Bede, were far from resembling the noble savage imagined by Tacitus and other idealists. But they were trained for future empire in the hard school of a northern climate.

All that concerns us in the history of these kingdoms can be briefly stated.

(1) Teutonic England hardly enters into European history before the year

800. In the fifth and sixth centuries a multitude of small colonies had been founded on the soil of Roman Britain by the three tribes of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes, who migrated thither from Jutland and Schleswig-Holstein. A few considerable kingdoms had emerged from this chaos by the time when the English received from Rome their first Christian teacher, St. Augustine: Kent, Sussex, and Wessex in the south; Mercia and East Anglia in the Midlands; Northumbria between the Humber and the Forth. The efforts of every ruler were devoted to the establishment of his personal ascendancy over the whole group. Such a supremacy was obtained by AEthelbert of Kent, the first royal convert to Christianity; by Edwin of Northumbria and his two immediate successors in the seventh century; by Offa of Mercia (757-796); and by Egbert of Wessex (802-839), whose power foreshadowed the later triumphs of the house of Alfred.

(2) Southern Gaul was divided in the fifth century between the Visigoths and the Burgundians. The former of these peoples entered the imperial service in 410, after the death of Alaric I, who had led them into Italy. His successors, Athaulf and Wallia, undertook to pacify Gaul and to recover Spain for the rulers of Ravenna; the second of these sovereigns was rewarded with a settlement, for himself and his followers, between the Loire and the Garonne (419). In the terrible battle of Troyes, against Attila the Hun (451), they did good service to the Roman cause; but both before and after that event they were chiefly occupied in extending their boundaries by force or fraud. At the close of the fifth century their power in Gaul extended from the Loire to the Pyrenees, from the Atlantic to the Rhone valley, and along the Mediterranean seaboard farther east to the Alps. In Spain--which had been, since 409, the prey of the Vandals, Alans and Suevi--they found a more legitimate field for their ambitions. Between 466 and 484 they annexed every part of the peninsula except the north-west corner, which remained the last stronghold of their defeated competitors. The Burgundians, from less auspicious beginnings, had built up a smaller but yet a powerful kingdom. Transplanted by a victorious Roman general to Savoy (443) from the lands between the Necker and the Main, they had descended into the Rhone basin at the invitation of the provincials, to protect that fertile land alike against Teutonic marauders and Roman tax-collectors. By the year 500 they ruled from the Durance in the south to the headwaters of the Doubs and the Saone in the north, from the Alps and the Jura to the sources of the Loire.

(3) Italy was less fortunate than Gaul; in the fifth century she was ravaged more persistently, since Rome and Ravenna were the most tempting prizes that the West could offer to conquerors seeking a settlement or to mere marauders; and for yet another two centuries her soil was in dispute between the Eastern Empire and the Teutons. The strategic importance of the peninsula, the magic of the name of Rome, the more recent tradition that Ravenna was the natural headquarters of imperial bureaucracy in the West, were three cogent reasons why the statesmen of Constantinople should insist that Italy must be recovered whatever outlying provinces of the West were abandoned. For sixty years after the deposition of Romulus Augustulus (476) Italy was entirely ruled by barbarians; then for more than two hundred years there was an Imperial Italy or a Papal Italy continually at feud with an Ostrogothic or a Lombard Italy. It would have been better for the Italians if either the Ostrogoths or the Lombards had triumphed decisively and at an early date.

The Ostrogoths entered Italy from the north-east in 489, under the lead

of Theodoric, the first and last statesman of their race. They came from the Middle Danube, where they had settled, with the leave of the Empire, after the death of Attila and the dissolution of his army. They were now in search of a more kindly habitation, and brought with them their wives, their children, and their household stuff on waggons. Their way was barred by Odoacer the Patrician--general of the Italian army and King of Italy in all but name. It cost them four years of hard fighting to overthrow this self-constituted representative of the Empire. After that they had no overt opposition to fear. To the Italians there was little difference between Odoacer and Theodoric. The change of rulers did not affect their material interests, since Theodoric merely appropriated that proportion of the cultivated land (one-third) which Odoacer had claimed for his followers. Nor was submission inconsistent with the loyalty demanded by the Eastern Empire; since for the moment it suited imperial policy to accept the Visigothic King as the successor of Odoacer. Theodoric reigned over Italy for thirty-three years (493-526). A tolerant and enlightened ruler, he spared no effort to give his rule a legal character, and to protect the Italians against oppression. Two eminent Romans, Liberius and Cassiodorus, acted successively as his confidential ad

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