

## HISTORY OF THE MIDDLE AGES



### I

#### THE BARBARIAN WORLD IN THE FOURTH AND FIFTH CENTURIES

**Definition of the Middle Ages.** — The term Middle Ages indicates the period which elapsed between the ruin of the Roman Empire and the establishment of the great modern monarchies. It extends from the German invasion at the beginning of the fifth century to the capture of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks ten centuries later in 1453.

In this period, situated between ancient and modern times, the cultivation of arts and letters was suspended, although a new and magnificent architecture was developed. In place of the republics of antiquity and the monarchies of our day there grew up a special organization called feudalism. This domination of the feudal lords, the product of many centuries, was finally overthrown by Louis XI, the Tudors and the princes contemporary with them. Although there were kings in all countries, the military and ecclesiastical chiefs were the real sovereigns from the ninth to the twelfth century. The central power had no force, local powers had no overseer or guide, the frontiers had no fixed limits. The sovereign and owner parcelled out the territory into a multitude of petty states where the sentiment of nationality could not exist. Nevertheless above this condition of many lords hovered the idea of Christianity represented by the pope, and of a certain political unity represented by the emperor in comparison with whom all the kings of Europe were provincial. Thus the great wars of those times were religious wars, as were the crusades against the Mussulmans of Palestine, the Moors of Spain, the Albigensian heretics or the pagans of the Baltic, or were a struggle between



the two powers which aspired to rule the world, a quarrel between Papacy and the Empire. Hence there is a wide difference between this period and those periods which preceded or followed. Hence of necessity it has a name and a place apart in universal history.

**The Northern Barbarians: their Habits and Religion.**—

During the military anarchy which drained the last resources of the Roman Empire, peoples, hitherto concealed in the depths of the north, south and east, were setting themselves in motion beyond its boundaries, to which they daily drew nearer. In the north were three layers of humanity, placed at intervals in the following order: Germans, Slavs and Turanian tribes. On the east were the Persians, a settled and stationary people, who had often made war on the empire but had no thought of invading it. On the south in the deserts of their great peninsula were the Arabs, who as yet caused no fear; and in the wastes of Africa the Moorish populations, who had been touched rather than permeated by Roman civilization.

At the death of Theodosius (395) there was no serious danger except from the north. Driven forward by the Asiatic hordes from the banks of the Volga, the Germans were pressing upon the frontiers of the empire. The Suevi or Suabians, Alemanni and Bavarians were in the south between the Main and Lake Constance. The Marcomanni, Quadi, Heruli and the great Gothic nation controlled the left bank of the Danube. In the west along the Rhine extended the confederation of the Franks, formed as early as the middle of the third century, and toward the mouth of the Ems, the Frisii, a remnant of the Batavi. In the north were the Vandals, Burgundi, Rugii, Longobardi or Lombards; between the Elbe and the Eyder, the Angles and Saxons; farther north, the Scandinavians, Jutes and Danes in Sweden and Denmark, whence they emerged to join the second invasion; and lastly in the immense plains of the east and at many points of the Danubian valley, the Slavs, who were to follow the Germanic invasion but only to enter into history later on, first through the Poles and then through the Russians.

A spirit totally different from that of the inhabitants of the Roman Empire animated these barbarians. Among them reigned the love of individual independence, the devotion of the warrior to his chieftain and a passion for wars

of adventure. As soon as the young man had received in the public assembly his buckler and lance, he was a warrior and a citizen. He immediately attached himself to some famous chieftain, whom he followed to battle with other warriors, his leudes or henchmen, always ready to die in his behalf. The government of the Germans was simple. The affairs of the tribe were administered in an assembly in which all took part. The warriors gathered there together in arms. The clash of shields denoted applause; a violent murmur, disapproval. The same assembly exercised judicial power. Each canton had its magistrate, the graf, and the whole nation had a *könig*, or king, elected from among the members of one special family which held hereditary possession of that title. For combat the warriors chose the leader, or *herzog*, whom they wished to follow.

The Olympus or heaven of these peoples presented a mixture of terrible and graceful conceptions. At the side of Odin, who gave victory and who by night rode through the air with the dead warriors; of Donar, the Hercules of the Germans; and of the fierce joys of Walhalla,—appeared the goddesses Freja and Holda, the Venus and the Diana of the north, who everywhere diffused peace and the arts. The Germans also adored Herta, the earth, Sunna, the sun, and her brother Mani, the moon, who was pursued by two wolves. The bards were their poets and encouraged them to brave death. It was their glory to die with a laugh.

The Germans cultivated the soil but little. They possessed no domain as private property, and every year the magistrates distributed to each village and each family the plot which they were to cultivate. They had no towns but scattered earthen huts far distant from each other, each surrounded by the plot which the proprietor cultivated. Their habits were tolerably pure. Polygamy was authorized only for the kings and the nobles. But drunkenness and bloody quarrels generally terminated their Homeric feasts, and they had a passion for gambling.

**Arrival of the Huns in Europe.**—Behind this Germanic family which was destined to occupy the greater part of the empire, pressed two other barbarous races: the Slavs whose turn did not come until later, and the Huns who were an object of fear to the people of the west. Their lives were passed in enormous chariots or in the saddle. Their bony faces, pierced with little eyes, their broad flat



noses, their enormous wide-spread ears and swarthy tattooed skins made them seem hardly human. At the end of the fourth century they had convulsed the whole barbaric world and precipitated the Germans upon the Empire of the West. In consequence of intestine discords a part of the nation of the Huns, driven on toward Europe, crossed the Volga, carrying with them the Alani. They dashed themselves against the great Gothic empire in which Hermanric had united the three branches of the nation: the Ostrogoths or Oriental Goths east of the Dnieper; the Visigoths or western Goths; the Gepidæ or Laggards farther to the north. The Ostrogoths submitted. The Visigoths fled toward the Danube and obtained from the Emperor Valens an asylum on the lands of the empire. They revolted soon after against their benefactor and slew him at the battle of Adrianople (378). But they were arrested by Theodosius who established many of them in Thrace, where at first they faithfully defended that frontier against the Huns.

**Invasion of the Visigoths. Alaric. The Great Invasion of 406.** — When at the death of Theodosius his two sons divided their heritage (395), Honorius received the West. His provinces bore the full brunt of the invasion from the north. In the course of half a century this empire endured the four terrible assaults of Alaric, Radagaisus, Genseric and Attila. Hardly had it fallen, when the Franks of Clovis wrested the finest portion from its invaders, which they still retain. The Visigoths under the lead of their king Alaric first tried their forces against the Empire of the East. They ravaged Thrace and Macedonia, passed Thermopylæ where there was no longer a Leonidas, devastated Attica, but respected Athens, and penetrated into the Peloponnesus. The Vandal Stilicho, general of Honorius, surrounded them on Mount Pholoe, but they escaped. Arcadius, who reigned at Constantinople, only rid himself of their dangerous presence by pointing out the Empire of the West. They hastened thither, but found at Polentia in Liguria (403) the same Stilicho, who defeated them and forced them to evacuate Italy. Honorius, to celebrate this victory of his lieutenant, enjoyed a triumph at Rome and offered the people the last sanguinary games of the circus. Then he hid himself at Ravenna behind the marshes at the south of the Po, disdaining his ancient capi-

tal, and no longer daring to reside in Milan where Alaric had nearly surprised him.

The ostensible consent of the empire had admitted upon its territory the Visigoths, who rewarded it badly. But now four peoples, the Suevi, Alani, Vandals and Burgundians, at two points forced their way across the frontier. One of their divisions passed the Alps under Radagaisus, but was annihilated at Fiesole by Stilicho. Another crossed the Rhine (406) and for two years laid waste the whole of Gaul. Afterward the Burgundians founded on the banks of the Rhone a kingdom which Honorius recognized in 413, and the Alani, the Suevi and the Vandals proceeded to inundate Spain. The great invasion had begun.

**Capture of Rome by Alaric (410). Kingdoms of the Visigoths, Suevi and Vandals.** — But Alaric returned to the charge. No longer was he confronted by Stilicho, who had been sacrificed to the jealousy of Honorius. He captured Rome, delivered it over to the fury of his barbarians who respected the Christian churches, and died some time later in Calabria at Cosenza (410). The Visigoths hollowed out a tomb for him in the bed of a river whose waters had been diverted, and then restored the natural course of the stream after having slain the prisoners who had done the work.

The power of the Visigoths did not expire with Alaric. Notwithstanding their sack of Rome this people, who had been so long in contact with the empire, were specially disposed to yield to the paramount influence of Roman civilization. Ataulf, the brother-in-law of Alaric, and after him Wallia, entered the service of Honorius. In his interest they rescued Gaul from three usurpers who had there assumed the purple, and Spain from the three barbarian tribes which had invaded it. For his reward Wallia obtained a portion of Aquitania, and founded the kingdom of the Visigoths (419) which was to cross the Alps. During the same year Hermanric organized with the remnants of the Suevi a kingdom in the mountains of the Asturias. A little later the Vandals, who had been crowded into the south of Spain, crossed into Africa, which was opened to them by the treachery of Count Boniface. They captured Hippo despite its long resistance, which the exhortations of the Bishop Saint Augustine sustained, and forced the Emperor Valentinian to recognize their occupancy (435). Genseric who made this conquest also seized Carthage



(439), founded a maritime power on those shores which had formerly acknowledged the Carthaginian sway, and until his death (477) ravaged all the coasts of the Mediterranean with his ships. In 453 he captured Rome and for the space of fourteen days gave it over to pillage.

**Attila.**—Four barbaric kingdoms had already risen in the West when Attila made his appearance. This is the great episode in the invasion of the fifth century. What would have become of Europe under the Tartar domination of Attila, the scourge of God, who wished the grass not to grow where his horse's hoof had fallen! Having put to death his brother Bleda, he reigned alone over the nation of the Huns, and held under his yoke all the peoples established on the banks of the Danube. He inhabited a wooden palace in a city in the plains of Pannonia, whence he had dictated laws and imposed tribute on Theodosius II, emperor of the East. When Genseric invited him to create a diversion favorable to his own designs he poured upon the West the immense hosts of his peoples. He traversed northeastern Gaul, overthrowing everything in his path, and laid siege to Orleans. The patrician Aëtius hastened thither with a mixed army, in which Visigoths, Burgundians, Franks and Saxons fought beside the Romans against the new invaders. The decisive battle of Châlons (451) drove Attila to the other side of the Rhine. He retreated toward Italy. There he destroyed many cities, and among others Aquileia, whose inhabitants escaped to the lagoons of the Adriatic where they laid the foundations of Venice. On his return to Pannonia he died of apoplexy (453) and the great power of the Huns wasted away in the quarrels of his sons.

The Western emperors were hardly more than playthings in the hands of the barbarian chiefs who commanded their troops. One of them, the Herule Odoacer, ended this death agony by assuming the title of king of Italy (476). Thus fell the great name of the Western Empire, an event more important in subsequent than in contemporary eyes, which had been accustomed through more than half a century to see the barbarian masters dispose of everything. Nevertheless a remnant of the empire still existed under the patrician Syagrius at the centre of Gaul, between the Loire and the Somme. Ten years later that too disappeared before the sword of the Franks.

## II

## PRINCIPAL BARBARIAN KINGDOMS. THE EASTERN EMPIRE

**Barbarian Kingdoms of Gaul, Spain and Africa.**—We have just seen how from the Loire to the Strait of Gibraltar Alaric and his successors founded the kingdom of the Visigoths in Gaul and Spain, how Genseric built that of the Vandals in Africa, and lastly how Attila ravaged everything but constructed nothing. Other barbarian dominations established were those of the Burgundians, the Suevi, the Anglo-Saxons, the Ostrogoths and the Lombards which speedily passed away.

The Burgundian kingdom, established in 413 in the valleys of the Saône and Rhone with Geneva and Vienne for its principal cities, had eight kings of little distinction. Clovis rendered it tributary in 500 and his sons conquered it in 534.

The kingdom of the Suevi, born at the same time, expired a few years later. In 409 this people invaded Spain and seized the northwest region or Galicia. Under its kings Rechila and Rechiarius it seemed about to conquer the whole of Spain, but the Goths arrested its growth and reduced it to subjection (585).

**Saxon Kingdoms in England.**—Britain, separated from the continent by the sea, had her invasion apart. Under the Romans three distinct peoples existed there. These were: in the north, in the Scotland of to-day, the Caledonians or Picts and Scots whom the emperors had been unable to subdue; in the east and south, the Lægrians who were affected by Roman civilization; on the west, beyond the Severn, the Cambrians or Welsh who seemed invincible in their mountains. Abandoned by the legions (428) and left defenceless to the incursions of the Picts, the Lægrians (455) entreated assistance from the Saxons, Jutes and Angles, who were incessantly setting out from their German and Scandinavian shores to plough the seas. Two



Saxon chiefs, Hengist and Horsa, routed the Picts and received in payment the isle of Thanet on the coast of Kent. But Hengist, despoiling those who had summoned him, took possession of the country from the Thames to the Channel and assumed the title of king of Kent (455). Thenceforth the ambition of all these pirates was to conquer a settlement in Britain. The kingdom of Sussex or South Saxons was founded in 491; that of Wessex or West Saxons in 516; and that of Essex or East Saxons in 526. In 547 began the invasion of the Angles, who founded the kingdoms of Northumberland or the kingdom north of the Humber; on the eastern British coast, of East Anglia (577) and Mercia (584). These three kingdoms of the Angles being reckoned with the four Saxon kingdoms, there were in Britain seven little monarchies or the Anglo-Saxon Heptarchy which later on formed a single state. The Saxons formed the basis of the present population of the country and to them England owes her language.

**Kingdom of the Ostrogoths in Italy. Theodoric (489-526).**

— The conquest of Italy by the Ostrogoths took place later and nearly coincided with the conquest of Gaul by the Franks. Emancipated from the yoke of the Huns by the death of Attila, the Ostrogoths in 475 had taken as their chief Theodoric, the son of one of their princes, who had been reared as a hostage at Constantinople. At the invitation of Zeno, emperor of the East, Theodoric conquered Italy from the Heruli (489-493), and showed himself the most truly great of the barbarian sovereigns prior to Charlemagne. To his kingdom of Italy by skilful negotiations he added Illyricum, Pannonia, Noricum and Rætia. A war against the Burgundians gave him the province of Marseilles and he routed a Frankish army near Arles in 507. The Bavarians paid him tribute. The Alemanni appealed to him for aid against Clovis. Finally at the death of Alaric II he became the guardian of his grandson Amalric and reigned in fact over the two great branches of the Gothic nation, whose possessions touched each other toward the Rhone and who occupied the shores of the Mediterranean in Spain, Gaul and Italy. Family alliances united him to almost all the barbarian kings.

He made an admirable use of peace. The newcomers needed land. Each city gave up one-third of its territory for distribution to the Goths. This preliminary assignment

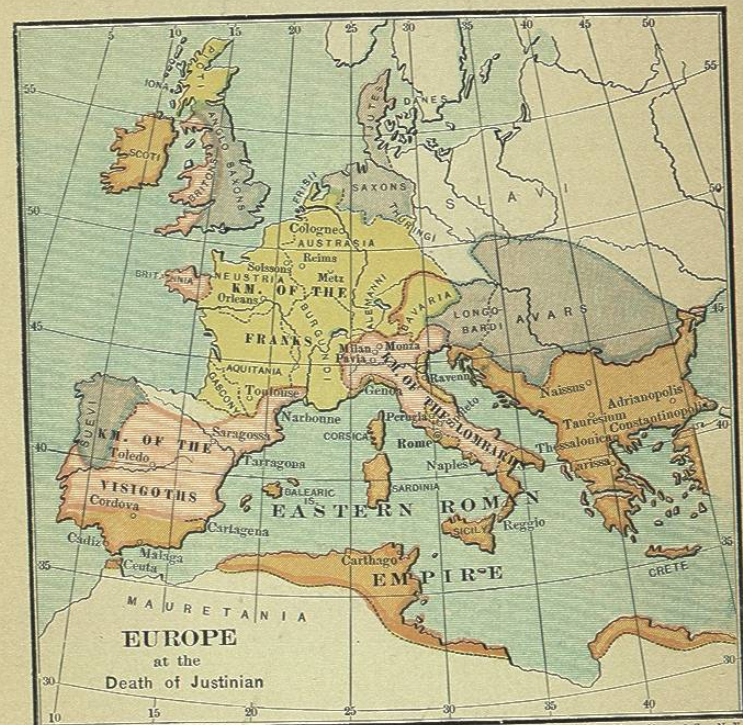
once made, a common law was established for the two peoples, though the Goths retained some of their peculiar customs. In other respects he aimed at separating the vanquished from the victors, reserving arms for the barbarians and civil dignities for the Romans. He possessed a great veneration for ancient imperial institutions. He consulted the senate of Rome and maintained the municipal system of government, himself appointing the decurions. Thus a barbarian restored to Italy a prosperity which she had lost under her emperors. The public edifices, aqueducts, theatres and baths were repaired, palaces and churches were built and the waste lands were cultivated. Companies were formed to drain the Pontine Marshes and those of Spoleto. The population increased. Theodoric, who did not know how to write, gathered around him the finest literary geniuses of the time, Cassiodorus, Boëthius and Bishop Ennodius. Himself an Arian, he respected the Catholics and confirmed the immunities of the churches. Yet the close of his reign was saddened by threats of persecution in reprisal for what the Eastern emperor was inflicting on the Arians, and by the torture of Boëthius and of the prefect Symmachus, unjustly accused of conspiracy. He died in 526 and his kingdom survived him only a few years. Thus too passed rapidly away the Vandals and the Heruli, the Suevi and the Burgundians, the western and eastern Goths. They all formed part of the barbarian guard which first entered the empire. Roman society, incapable of defending itself, seems to have been strong enough to communicate to those who came in contact with it that death which it bore in its own breast.

**Revival of the Eastern Empire. Justinian (527-565).** — The ruined Empire of the West had been replaced by thirteen Germanic kingdoms; those of the Burgundians, Visigoths, Suevi, Vandals, Franks, Ostrogoths and of the seven Anglo-Saxon states. The Greek Empire alone had escaped invasion and remained erect in spite of its religious discords and the general weakness of its government. The reign of Theodosius II, the longest which the fifth century presents (418-450), was really that of Pulcheria, the sister of the incapable emperor. It was signalized by the publication of the Theodosian Code. Under Zeno and Anastasius Constantinople was racked by quarrels and riots on questions of religion.



Justinian restored vigor and brilliancy to this empire. He preserved intact the eastern frontier and forced the Persians to conclude in 562, after thirty-four years of war, an honorable treaty. He repulsed (559) an invasion of Bulgarians which threatened Constantinople. In the west he destroyed the kingdom of the Vandals by the victories of Belisarius and that of the Ostrogoths by the successes of the eunuch Narses. While his generals were winning battles, his lawyers were drawing up the *Code*, the *Digest* or *Pandects*, the *Institutes* and the *Novellæ*, which have transmitted to posterity the substance of ancient jurisprudence. This reign was the glorious protest of the Eastern Empire and of civilization against invasion and barbarism. The splendor was of brief continuance. In 568 Italy was lost. Conquered by the Lombards, a fourteenth Germanic kingdom was founded, which lasted more than 200 years and was to fall under the blows of Charlemagne. From her geographic position Constantinople could not be the heir of Rome. The inheritance of the Western Empire was to belong to the Germanic race.

As for the Eastern Empire, after that brilliant period it passed many gloomy days despite the talent of princes like Maurice and Heraclius. Thanks to her strategic situation Constantinople, the daughter of aged Rome, who bore on her brow from her very birth the wrinkles of her mother, alone remained standing like an isolated rock. For ten centuries she braved victoriously the assaults of the Mussulmans in the south and of the Slavic and Turanian tribes on the north.



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