

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ITALIAN REPUBLICS.

FROM A. D. 1085 TO A. D. 1266.

ENCROACHMENTS OF THE CHURCH.—HILDEBRAND.—HUMILIATION OF THE EMPEROR HENRY IV.—DOMINION OF THE GERMAN EMPIRE OVER ITALY.—WAR BETWEEN THE EMPEROR AND LOMBARDY.—SOUTHERN ITALY.—ORGANIZATION OF THE KINGDOM OF NAPLES.—THE NORMAN EMIGRATION.—THE VENETIAN REPUBLIC.—ITS RISE AND VICISSITUDES.—ITALIAN CHARACTER.—THE CRUSADES.—CONFLICT BETWEEN HONORIUS III. AND FREDERIC II.—ANARCHY IN ROME.—CONQUEST OF THE KINGDOM OF NAPLES BY CHARLES OF ANJOU.—FLORENCE.—ITS CONFLICTS.

THE papal church was now becoming the great power which for centuries was to overshadow Italy and all Europe. The genius of Hildebrand, an obscure monk of Tuscany, combined its energies, and guided them in the career of conquest. In the cloistered solitude of his study he devised his plan for the subjugation of the world to the papal throne. The election of the popes was vested in the cardinals. The clergy were detached from human society by the law of celibacy. The pope was declared to be God's vicegerent, incapable of erring, and above all human law. In the face of the most violent opposition, he accomplished all his plans. The power of the pope over the popular mind became so extraordinary, that no king could hold his crown in opposition to the will of the holy father. Inauguration by his hand became an essential title to the crown.

The German emperor Conrad, who succeeded Henry II. hastened to Rome, to receive the diadem from the hands of the pontiff. Being engaged in distant wars, he could devote but little attention to Italy, and for many years the peninsula presented an aspect of anarchy. Nobles, bishops, and citizens

struggled against each other in bloody warfare. In the year A. D. 1073 Hildebrand was chosen pope, with the title of Gregory the VII. During the long minority of the emperor Henry IV., of Germany, the sagacity of Hildebrand had been diligently employed in pushing the papal encroachments. Never did a more imperial mind dwell in a fleshly tabernacle. The pope and the emperor soon found themselves in collision, each claiming the supremacy. The quarrel arose upon the right of investiture, or in other words, whether bishops and dukes were to consider themselves as vassals of the pope or the emperor. Hostile messages were sent to and fro, until the pope had the arrogance to summon the emperor to appear before him in Rome. The indignant sovereign assembled a council of prelates and other vassals at Worms, and declared Gregory no longer to be worthy to be recognized as pope. Gregory, in retaliation, excommunicated Henry, released his subjects from the oath of allegiance, and prohibited them, under pain of eternal damnation from supporting the emperor, or in any way ministering to his wants.

The people were so overawed by the terrors of this decree, that they at once abandoned their sovereign; and he was left utterly ruined and helpless. Under the dictation of the pope the princes met at Oppenheim, to choose another emperor. Henry IV., in dismay and despair, crossed the Alps, in the dead of winter, to throw himself at the feet of the offended pontiff and implore forgiveness. Gregory was then at the castle of Canossa, near Reggio, in the domain of Matilda, the opulent and powerful countess of Tuscany, who was, with all the enthusiasm of her glowing soul, devoted to the papacy.

For three days, in mid-winter, the abject monarch stood a suppliant at the portal of the castle before he could be admitted. Barefooted, bareheaded, and clothed in a woolen shirt, he was compelled to wait, that the world might witness his humiliation. At length the haughty pontiff condescended to grant absolution to the penitent. The reconciliation which

ensued was far from cordial, and Henry, mortified and exasperated, returned to his realms, watching for an opportunity more successfully to resume the strife. Soon the ecclesiastical censure was renewed, and the emperor was again deposed. In the meantime Henry IV. had strengthened his cause, and the pope's bulk had lost somewhat of its terror. Both parties now prepared for war.

Matilda, the celebrated countess of Tuscany, and some other Italian feudatories, placed their troops at the service of Gregory. Henry led an army into Italy; the papal troops were routed; Gregory was deposed, and Guibert, archbishop of Ravenna, was raised to the papacy by the sword of the emperor. The grateful pontiff placed the imperial crown, with the blessing of the church, upon the brow of the conqueror. Gregory VII. sought refuge among the Normans of Naples.

The Neapolitans, led by the holy father, whom the emperor had deposed, marched against Rome. Henry IV. retreated. They captured the city and surrendered it to military license, fire and the sword. Gregory reinstated, but still humiliated, believing himself no longer secure in Rome, retired to Naples, where he remained in virtual exile until he died, with his last breath hurling an anathema against his unrelenting foe, the emperor. His successors, Victor III., Urban II., and Paschal II. continued the conflict, aided by the amazonian energies of the Countess Matilda. Henry was driven out of Italy, and, dethroned by his own son, Henry V., died a broken hearted old man, in the extreme of destitution and misery.

For fifteen years the struggle continued between Henry V and the Roman pontiffs. At length they entered into a compromise, the pope resigning the temporal, and the emperor the spiritual prerogatives of investitures. During this long war of sixty-three years, a series of republics had been gradually springing up in northern Italy. The great cities had become the centers of these republics, and the old feudal

nobility had gradually passed away. The civil war had rendered it necessary that walls should be reared around the towns. The sound of an alarm-bell assembled all the men, capable of bearing arms, in the great square, and this meeting for deliberation, was called a *parliament*. Two consuls, and a common council, submitted questions to the decision of the parliament. While most of these northern free cities confessed a vague allegiance to the German emperor, others, as Venice, Ravenna, Rome, Naples, and Genoa, still remained nominally under the sway of the eastern empire. Almost the only indications of the existence of the imperial power which now remained, was that the name of the emperor was affixed to the municipal acts, and his effigy was stamped upon the coin. The democratic cities of Lombardy possessed but little of the spirit of true democracy. The stronger were ever eager to domineer over the weaker. Milan crushed Lodi and scattered its citizens into villages, trampling upon all their rights. The Lodise, after years of oppression, appealed to the emperor Frederic for help.

Glad of this opportunity to strengthen his power in Italy, the emperor with a small but vigorous and efficient army crossed the Alps, and, advancing through the Trentine valley, entered the plains of Lombardy. Here petitioners crowded around him, imploring protection from the haughty, tyrannical, aristocratic democracy of Milan. In a cruel march of desolation and plunder the emperor ravished the country. Many cities were in alliance with the Milanese, while others espoused the cause of the emperor. Notwithstanding the strength of the imperial army, the walls of Milan were so substantial, and the preparations for defense so ample, that the first movements of Frederic were against the allied cities. Tumi, Vercelli, Asti, and Tortona, after bloody battles and protracted sieges, fell into his hands. The valiant little city of Tortona for two months defied the emperor.

The emperor was provided with the most powerful ma-

chines of war then in use. With the balistæ of the ancients, he threw such masses of rock into the city, that three men were crushed by the fall of a single piece. But famine at length compelled to capitulation, and Tortona was razed to the ground. Frederic, having demolished or subdued most of the cities in the alliance with Milan, entered Pavia, and there received the celebrated iron crown of Lombardy;—the iron of which it was wrought, was said to be one of the spikes which had pierced our Saviour, and was deemed far more precious than gold. He then advanced to Rome, that he might receive his imperial crown from pope Adrian IV. The pope was now so powerful, and it was deemed so essential to the perpetuity of any reign that the coronation should be hallowed by the blessing of the pontiff, that the haughty Frederic condescended to do homage to his spiritual lord, by holding his stirrup while he descended from his mule. It was not until after this act of humiliation that the pope would confer upon him the kiss of peace. Having been crowned at Rome, the emperor returned to Germany, after an absence of one year, without even venturing to approach the walls of Milan.

The Milanese and Frederic made new preparations for the prosecution of the war. The influence of Milan was so great that the whole of Lombardy was combining against the emperor. With a hundred thousand infantry and fifteen thousand cavalry, Frederic commenced his march again through the passes of the Alps, and, with this immense force, invested the city. Massive walls of vast circuit surrounded the city, and the bulwarks were protected by a broad and deep fosse. Battering rams and balistæ were here of but little avail, and famine was manifestly the all-availing foe, which could alone bring the city to a capitulation. By this cruel enemy the Milanese were subdued. History can express no sympathy for them. They deserved to be trampled upon by the power

ful, for they themselves most unscrupulously had been trampling upon the weak.

The treaty was more favorable than the tyrannic Milanese had any right to expect from the tyrant of Germany. A large ransom was extorted; they built a palace for the emperor, and took the oath of allegiance to him; and they were allowed a certain degree of independence in the regulation of their municipal affairs. Frederic paid but little regard to his treaty; and encroachment followed encroachment as he endeavored to reduce all of Lombardy into entire submission. The mangled worm turned against the foot that crushed it. With horrible ferocity Frederic took vengeance. This cruelty roused new energies of despair. For two years the Milanese, with their allied cities, fought the emperor, struggling through and over the smoldering ruins of Lombardy. Crema was demolished. The harvests were destroyed, the fields devastated, and at length, after scenes of misery which no pen can describe, Milan fell.

For three weeks the emperor brooded over his vengeance, while the Milanese waited trembling in suspense. He then ordered every man, woman, and child immediately to leave the city. The sick, the dying, the newly born, all were to go. Not one was to be left behind. With his army of one hundred and fifteen thousand men, the emperor entered the deserted streets. The city was then surrendered to the troops for plunder. For several days they worked diligently in wresting from it every thing they deemed of value. Then the order was issued for the utter demolition of the city and all its defenses. For six days this immense army toiled in this work of destruction, and rested on the seventh day, their efforts being effectually accomplished. Milan was a heap of ruins, and all her children were scattered, in misery and beggary, over the plains. Awful was this doom. It was the same which Milan had inflicted upon Lodi. Aristocratic

tyrants can do nothing worse than democratic tyrants are capable of doing.

Lombardy was now submissive in her chains and her misery. But slaves will ever rise in insurrection. A conspiracy was formed, organizing the famous *Lombard League*. The leading cities of Lombardy combined, taking advantage of the moment when the arms of the emperor were employed in the siege of Rome, as he endeavored to force upon the church an anti-pope in the place of Alexander III. Pestilence was breathed upon his army, and it perished in the Campania. The emperor was thus compelled to a disgraceful retreat beyond the Alps. Harassed by the cares of his vast empire, six years elapsed before the emperor could lead another army into the plains of Lombardy. In the spring of 1176, the peals of the imperial bugles were heard, as the gleam of the silken banners were again seen winding through the defiles of the Alps. Milan, in the meantime, having been rebuilt, and, with the other cities of Lombardy, had made vigorous preparation for the conflict.

The hostile armies met on the plain of Legnano, about fifteen miles from Milan. What was called *religious* enthusiasm inspired the Milanese with fiend-like ferocity. The banner of the cross was borne on a sacred car called the *carrocio*, in memory of the ark of the covenant which guided the Israelites to conquest. Imploring the aid of St. Ambrose, the canonized archbishop of Milan, and of St. Peter, and having taken a solemn vow, upon the sacraments of the Lord's Supper, that they would conquer or perish, they rushed, regardless of wounds and death, upon the imperial squadrons, and trampled them in the dust. For eight miles the plain was covered with the slaughter of the fugitives.

The imperial army was so utterly overthrown and dispersed, that for some time the fate of the emperor was uncertain. Three days after the battle he appeared in Pavia, alone, and in the disguise in which he had escaped from the horrible

scene of carnage. Pavia, the imperial head-quarters, and governed by the imperial troops, had not thrown off the yoke of German subjection. For twenty-two years Frederic had been struggling against the independence of Lombardy. With seven armies he had swept their doomed territory, inflicting atrocities the recital of which sickens humanity. The fatal battle of Legnano left him for a time powerless, and he was compelled to assent to a truce for six years. At the expiration of this truce, in the year 1183, by the peace of Constance, the comparative independence of Lombardy was secured; a general supremacy of dignity rather than of power being conceded to the emperor.

Southern Italy was still in a state of nominal subjection to the eastern, or Greek empire, whose sovereigns resided at Constantinople. There were many intrigues, and some battles between the Grecian and the German emperors for dominion over these coveted realms. Years of obscurity, confusion and petty wars rolled on in which nothing occurred worthy of being recorded. Sicily was in the power of the infidel Saracens, and their piratic craft infested all the neighboring seas, often making devastating inroads upon the land. The natural history of the lion, the tiger, and the leopard, is but a record of dove-like mildness, when compared with the natural history of man. His reign upon earth has been but the demoniac infiction of blood and woe.

"'Tis dangerous to rouse the lion,
Deadly to cross the tiger's path,
But the most terrible of terrors,
Is man himself, in his wild wrath."

Early in the tenth century the Normans established themselves in France. Embracing nominal Christianity, they were inspired with zeal to visit the shrines of saints and martyrs in Palestine. Traversing France and Italy they embarked for the Holy Land. They thus became acquainted with the fertile soil, and the luxurious clime of southern Italy. The effemina-

cy of the inhabitants invited invasion. The old Norman barons, steel clad, and followed by retainers armed to the teeth, commenced emigrating. Their numbers rapidly increased, and they began to accumulate near Naples. The Greek emperor undertook to rescue Sicily from the infidel Saracens, and enlisted in his army three hundred of these steel sinewed Norman cavaliers. They fought fiercely and successfully, but, dissatisfied with the division of the spoil, they formed a conspiracy to wrest the whole of southern Italy from the dominion of the Greeks. With an army of but seven hundred horse and five hundred foot, they commenced the bold enterprise. They soon were in entire possession of Apulia, a province about the size of the state of Massachusetts, now belonging to the kingdom of Naples. This beautiful province was divided among twelve Norman counts, whose fiefs formed a feudal republic. One of their number, William of the Iron Arm, was invested with a general supremacy to lead them to battle.

Pope Leo IX., alarmed by their encroachments, raised an army for their destruction. Germans, Greeks, and Lombards were assembled beneath the sacred banner, and the pope in person was so forgetful of his office as to lead the host. These scenes occurred anterior to the events we have been describing in Lombardy.

Reinforcements from France hastened to the camp of William, and the Norman and the papal troops met in battle. The troops of the pontiff were utterly routed, and Leo himself fell into the hands of his enemies. But religion, degenerating into superstition, leads men to the strangest freaks. These devout, blood-stained warriors, true children of the church, prostrated themselves before their holy captive, and implored absolution for the guilt of defending themselves against him. The simple hearted ecclesiastic, not only pardoned them, and granted them the full possession of the lands they had conquered, as a fief of the holy see, but, in

accordance with ecclesiastical morality in that age, conferred upon them the investiture of all the lands they might subsequently conquer in southern Italy. The pope and the warriors thus took leave of each other, exceedingly good friends, and pledged to mutual assistance.

Slowly and surely the Normans advanced, until they had conquered all the country which now constitutes the kingdom of Naples. Thirty years of carnage and misery was the price paid for this conquest. The realm was divided into two duchies, Calabria and Apulia. Sicily was attached to them as a fief, under the rule of one who possessed the title of great Count. At length Roger II., collecting in his hands the united powers of duke of Apulia and Calabria, and great count of Sicily, ambitiously attained the kingly crown, by papal investiture. Naples became the capital of the kingdom. The force of habit and of institutions is such that for six hundred years the kingdom of Naples acknowledged the superiority of the popedom.

The Venetian republic was making rapid strides in wealth and power. It, however, fought its way to opulence and renown through innumerable petty yet bloody battles, with surrounding foes. Venice had entered into the Lombard league against the emperor Frederic, but still she never hesitated to violate her pledge when it seemed for her interest so to do, even joining the emperor to destroy her sister city, Ancona, hoping thus to crush a rival in the commerce of the Adriatic. The dukes or doges of Venice, through ebbs and floods of fortune, through defeats and victories, were gradually making accessions to their domains. The doges were nominated in a general assembly of the citizens. This often gave rise to very bitter and tumultuous factions. So jealous were the people lest there should be the claim of hereditary right to the dukedom, that it became a fundamental law of the state, that the reigning doge should never associate a son in the government. The doge was also associated with a

council, who were to coöperate with him in all important measures. At length, as the republic increased, a sort of legislature, composed of four hundred and eighty delegates, was organized; while a smaller counsel assisted the doge in measures requiring special or secret despatch.

This Venetian constitution prepared the republic for a very brilliant career, of political and commercial grandeur. All Europe was soon engaged in the wars of the crusades for the recovery of the Holy Land from the infidels. The same influences which organized the powerful republics of Lombardy and Venice, also soon constituted many others, such as Pisa, Genoa, and Tuscany. The maritime republics became vastly enriched by the crusades,—transporting troops to Palestine and conveying back the valuable products of eastern climes. Venice alone, employed two hundred vessels in this business. But a very fierce and disgraceful spirit of rivalry prevailed between the republics of Venice, Pisa, and Genoa, and they were almost constantly engaged in implacable warfare. Their boasted love of liberty, was liberty to trample upon the rights of others. They wished to have no masters, but to be masters. Such love of liberty, liberty for ones-self and oppression for others deserves, and has ever encountered divine indignation.

The Italian character, at this age of the world, presents few attractive features. We have been accustomed to applaud their indomitable love of liberty. But haughty, revengeful, and domineering, the Italian grasped power only to wield it for his own selfish purposes, and he was ever ready to crush any one who stood in the way of his own advancement. Every city was the foe of every other city, and they could never unite, save when driven together by a common enemy. The old conflict between the aristocratic and plebeian orders raged with unabated virulence. Religion degenerated into mere ecclesiasticism, having but little influence over political or social evils. Heresy was a deadly crime. Wrong and

outrage were venial offences with which the church did not stoop to intermeddle.

About this time the afflictive intelligence reached Europe, that Jerusalem had fallen before the power of the "great and mighty Saladin." The emperor Frederic roused all his energies for a new crusade. Leading in person his armies, he was drowned in crossing a swollen stream in Armenia. Henry VI. succeeded to the imperial crown of Italy and Germany. His sway over Italy, as we have shown, was very indefinite, being nominal rather than real. Henry was a ferocious monster, whose only virtue was a sort of bull-dog courage. Tancred, of the Norman line, was now upon the throne of Naples and Sicily. Henry led an army for the conquest of Naples, to compel the recognition there of his imperial power; but he utterly failed.

Quite suddenly Tancred died in the flower of his age, leaving the throne to his widow and child. The savage emperor again pounced upon Naples, took both mother and child captive, tore out the eyes of the poor boy, and sent both him and his mother to the dungeons of a prison. He then plundered the whole kingdom remorselessly, and punished with great severity all the nobles who had fought for Tancred. Some were hanged, some burned alive, and others had their eyes plucked out. In the siege of a castle, God, in mercy, caused the monster to be stricken down. An instinctive sense of justice leads one to rejoice in the divine declaration, "After death cometh the judgment."

With no recognition of the fraternity of man, all Italy continued convulsed with internal feuds, the oppressed of to-day being the oppressors of to-morrow. The republics, internally, were agitated by contending factions; while hostile fleets and armies were incessantly meeting in the shock of war. The antagonistic nobles reared their castles of massive stone, strengthened with towers, capable of repelling assault and enduring siege. Huge gates of iron defended the