

The beautiful Constance whom he had wedded, and through whose rich dowry he had gained his kingdom, he neglected, abandoned, divorced, imprisoned, without accusing or even suspecting her of any faults. His vagrant desires were weary of her, and he sought other charms. He afterward compelled the unhappy Constance to marry count Andrea, one of his favorites. As she was dragged to the altar, she said indignantly and aloud, in the presence of the assembled court and people:

“Count Andrea, you are to esteem yourself the most fortunate cavalier of this kingdom, for you are about to receive for your mistress the lawful wife of your liege.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

FRAGMENTARY ITALY.

FROM A. D. 1400 TO A. D. 1600.

DAWN OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY.—SCHISM IN THE CHURCH.—THE THREE POPES.—THE GREAT COUNCIL OF CONSTANCE.—“GOOD OLD TIMES.”—BEATRICE TENDA.—THE DUKES OF SAVOY.—THE HOUSE OF MEDIOL.—EUROPE MENACED BY THE TURKS.—THE GREAT EUROPEAN MONARCHIES.—FRAGMENTARY ITALY.—LEO X.—FRENCH CONQUESTS.—SPANISH CONQUESTS.—THE EMPEROR CHARLES V. MASTER OF ITALY.—PAPAL STRUGGLES.—FATE OF FLORENCE.—THE DUCHY OF PARMA—OF TUSCANY.

THE morning of the fifteenth century dawned upon Italy in clouds and gloom. The duke of Milan was master of nearly all of Lombardy, and was menacing Florence with apparently resistless power. Naples was utterly exhausted with her terrific civil wars. Venice, secure within her lagoons, was overawed by the most merciless oligarchy. The papal power had fallen into utter contempt. The annals of those days are filled mainly with the record of wars, treachery, murders, rapine, and crimes of every hue. Venice, by the foulest aggression, had extended her domain to the Adige, and the Lion of St. Mark, her symbolic banner, floated from the towers of Treviso, Feltro, Belluno, Verona, Vicenza, and Padua.

Urban VI., who had caused the schism in the church, died in the year 1389, and Boniface IX. was chosen as his successor. He died in 1404, and the cardinals, surrounded by a mob, in the wildest scene of tumult and uproar, raised Innocent VII. to the papal throne. Ladislaus, the stern king of Naples, drove the pope from the city, in an attempt to compel the states of the church to acknowledge him as their liege lord. He failed, and in his rage plundered and fired the city. Innocent soon died, and Gregory XII. was conducted to the

papal chair, in Rome. Europe was weary, and the church ashamed of the schism. But the states were so equally divided between Rome and Avignon, that it was difficult to effect a compromise.

Upon the death of Clement VII. the cardinals, at Avignon, chose Benedict XIII. The university of France, disgusted with this state of things, refused to recognize either as legitimate pope; and the discontent became so general that the cardinals, to rescue the church from ruin, convoked a general council at Pisa, and summoned both popes to appear before them. This was new experience for God's vicegerents, and they both indignantly refused. Whereupon the council of Pisa, consisting of the cardinals, and a numerous body of prelates from all parts of the Christian world, aided by ambassadors from most of the crowned heads of Europe, after long and solemn deliberation, performed the very extraordinary act, which they amazed mankind, of *deposing* both Gregory XII. and Benedict XIII. They then elected the cardinal of Milan to the papal dignity with the title of Alexander V.

There were now three popes instead of two. Benedict XIII., with three cardinals adhering to him, had convoked a council of his partisan clergy at Perpignan, a gloomy fortress on the frontiers of Spain. Gregory XII., with four cardinals, and the prelates who rallied around him, met at Ravenna, in Italy. And now from these three papal thrones bulls of excommunication were hurled, like the fabled thunderbolts of Jove. The several powers of Europe arranged themselves on different sides, grasped their arms, and war continued its hideous revels. Alexander V., through many bloody battles, established himself in Rome, the ancient seat of papacy. In less than a year he died; and a cardinal, of disgraceful character succeeded, by the title of John XXIII.

Ladislaus, of Naples, ravaged Italy like a famished tiger. With all the belligerents the papal quarrel seemed to be merely the occasion they embraced to extend their dominions by

crushing their neighbors. Ladislaus reduced all of the states of the church to his sway; extended his frontiers to Tuscany, and was advancing with such strides that he threatened to bring all Italy beneath his scepter. But death, the kindest ally of oppressed mankind, struck the tyrant down. In loathsome disease, torn with convulsions, and shrieking in agony, he sank into the grave—and Italy drew a long breath of relief.

The shameful struggles of the popes still agitated all Europe, desolating wide realms with conflagration and carnage. The emperor Sigismund, of Germany, a debauched voluptuary, but a man of marvelous energy of character, undertook to terminate the strife. In several personal interviews with John XXIII., he overawed the holy father, and compelled him to invite a council of the clergy of Christendom in the imperial city of Constance, on the shore of the lake of the same name. The pope and the emperor in person attended this famous council; and there was also the gathering of ambassadors from nearly all the princes and states of Europe. This memorable council was composed of twenty cardinals, one hundred and seventeen patriarchs and bishops, six hundred ecclesiastics of next higher rank, and four thousand priests. There were also twenty-six princes present and one hundred and forty counts.

John XXIII., finding that the council was on the eve of deposing all three of the popes, fled from Constance in the disguise of a groom, and threw himself upon the protection of Frederic, duke of Austria. But a division of the imperial army pursued the fugitive, and brought him back a prisoner to Constance. Gregory XII., alarmed by this example, threw down both tiara and keys, and was thankful to retain the office of cardinal. Benedict XIII., sustained by the powerful arm of Spain, was more obstinate. But he soon found himself constrained to yield to the almost unanimous voice of Europe. The three rival popes were laid aside by the council, and a new pope was chosen, Otho Colonna, who assumed the

title of Martin V. The martyrdom of Jerome of Prague, and of John Huss, which deeds of atrocity were perpetrated by this council, hardly belong to the history of Italy.

We find individuals who say that old times were better than the present. Contemplate "good old times" in Milan in the early part of the fifteenth century, under Giovanni, duke of Milan. From boyhood he had been nursed in atrocities, taking a fiend-like pleasure in witnessing every conceivable form of agony. His chief enjoyment was to see his bloodhounds tear down the victims he exposed to their rage. His huntsman fed the hounds on human flesh, to make them efficient in tearing to pieces their prey. The prisons of Milan were emptied, that the duke might enjoy this sport. On one occasion, when several gentlemen of Milan had been torn to pieces by his hounds, the innocent, helpless son of one of these gentlemen was thrown into the arena. The dogs, sated with blood, refused to fasten upon the poor child, when the duke himself drew his sword and ripped open the bowels of his victim, kneeling before him and crying for mercy. These facts are authenticated beyond all possible doubt. The friends of this child assassinated the duke. What verdict shall history pronounce upon the crime? It is well for us all that *infinite wisdom* will sit upon the throne of final judgment.

Filippo, the successor of this wretch on the ducal throne, was also his successor in infamy and brutality. He had married Beatrice Tenda, a lady of large fortune, that through the influence of her wealth he might be able to grasp the scepter. Having obtained the dowry and the scepter, he now wished to get rid of his spouse. He had already, with the basest treachery, murdered many whom he deemed in the way of his ambition. Selecting a young man of his court, he accused him of adulterous commerce with his duchess—stretched the unhappy, innocent youth upon the rack, and by crushing all his bones, and pouring an intolerable tide of agony along all his quivering nerves, compelled his victim to avow whatever his

tormentors desired. The mangled, palpitating form was then beheaded.

The wife of the duke was then placed upon the wheel, to compel her to confess a crime of which she had not been guilty. But Beatrice, with superhuman fortitude, endured the torture. Bone after bone was dislocated, and still Beatrice exclaimed, "I am not guilty." Nerve after nerve quivered in its frightful accumulations of agony, and still Beatrice shrieked, and when she could no longer shriek, groaned, "I am innocent." And as the ax fell to terminate her sufferings, with her last sigh she persisted that she was guiltless.

God did not, in this world, summon the wretch Filippo to account for his crimes. He was not thwarted in any of his plans of ambition. By an incessant series of encroachments over his weaker neighbors, he raised Milan to a degree of power and splendor never known before, and he died at last in his own tranquil chamber. There is in the human breast an instinct of justice which demands a future day of retribution.

From the Italian chaos a new power, about this time, began to emerge, on the western frontiers of the Milanese states. In the valley of the Savoyard watered by the little river of Arc, there was a petty lordship, possessed by the counts of Maurienne. Gradually they extended their survey over the whole of Savoy, a romantic realm of mountains, forests, and ravines, situated on the western slope of the Alps, and about half as large as the state of Massachusetts. By marriages and encroachments they pressed on, generation after generation, until large rural portions of Piedmont, with many of the important cities, fell under their dominion. The counts of Savoy began now to be regarded as one of the *powers* of Italy. The emperor Sigismund dignified their enlarged territory with the title of a duchy, and elevated the count to a duke. Amadeus VIII. was the first duke of Savoy being raised to that dignity in the year 1418.

Still Italy remained but the arena, in which all the nations of the peninsula were engaged, pell mell, in interminable gladiatorial conflict. There was no cessation, except to take breath and mend their battered arms. The millions of peasants, bareheaded, and barefooted, who toiled in the fields, were with difficulty enabled to raise food for themselves, and for the hundreds of thousands who did the fighting. In the great cities, a few merchants became enriched by commerce; and successful generals rioted in luxury obtained by the plunder of provinces.

Suddenly Europe was alarmed by the tidings that the Turks, under Mahomet II., had taken Constantinople, and that, with enormous armies, flushed with victory, they were ascending the Danube, and were also embarking on the Adriatic, and threatening all Europe with subjugation. The peril was so imminent that a congress was immediately summoned, to meet at Rome, under the presidency of the pope, Nicholas V. But the antagonistic princes, each grasping at his own aggrandisement, could form no combination. Venice and Milan exposed to the first inroads of the Turks, alone united. Naples and Florence soon joined them. The petty states of Greece had fallen, one after another, into the hands of the Turks. The ferocious army of Mahomet II., their cimeters dripping with blood, were within one day's march of the Italian frontiers.

The pope endeavored to rouse demoralized Europe to the rescue, and summoned a rising *en masse* of all the faithful, to meet at Ancona, whence they were to be transported across the Adriatic to meet their infidel foes. An immense concourse of half starved wretches, came in rags, hungry, penniless, and without arms. The pope, already aged and infirm, in the intensity of his disappointment lay down and died.

Venice, almost unaided, struggled fiercely against the Moslem with ever varying success. With an army, reported to have consisted of two hundred thousand men, conveyed in

four hundred galleys, the Turks entered the Archipelago, wrested the large and important island of Negropont from the Venetians, and put all the defenders of this island to the sword. The Venetians were compelled to sue for peace, after a struggle of fifteen years. The victorious Sultan exacted from them large portions of their territory, and an annual tribute. The Turks also took possession of the Euxine, wresting from Genoa all her possessions and all her influence on the shores of this inland sea.

The rise of the house of Medici in Florence, is one of those events in Italian history which deserves especial notice. Cosmo de Medici, who may be regarded as the founder of this house, was one of the most illustrious of men. For thirty years he governed Florence with singular sagacity, embellishing the city with the most gorgeous specimens of architecture, and founding galleries of art which still attract the admiration of the world. This family attained such power and became so obnoxious to pope Sextus IV., that the holy father, a scandalous old man, surrounded by pampered illegitimate children, conspired for the assassination of the two brothers of the duke—Giuliano and Lorenzo—in the midst of the most solemn offices of religion. As the kneeling victims bowed, at the elevation of the host, in high mass, two ecclesiastics were to plunge the fatal daggers.

Giuliano fell instantly, pierced to the heart by several blows. Lorenzo, warding the thrust, which but slightly grazed his neck, threw his cloak around his arm for a shield, and, with his sword, courageously defended himself, until his attendants rushed to his aid. The whole church was filled with consternation. Rapidly the friends of the Medici rallied around Lorenzo, and he was conveyed in safety to his palace. The indignation of the mob was so roused, by this outrage, that they fell with the utmost fury, upon the conspirators. The archbishop of Salviati, one of the accomplices, was hanged, in his prelatical robes, from the window of his palace. Sev-

eral other high ecclesiastics suffered the same ignominious punishment. More than seventy of the conspirators were cut down, and their bodies were exposed to every conceivable indignity in the streets.

At this time the church, in its external organization, as a hierarchy, was but a political institution, in the hands of men generally corrupt. The dignities of the church, conferring immense wealth and power, were more eagerly sought for than those of the army or the state. Hence, ambitious demagogues, rowdy and dissolute barons, and the debauched sons of princes, sat in the pontifical chair, and were decorated with the gorgeous robes of bishops, archbishops, and cardinals. The spirit of piety had fled from the high places of renown, and taken refuge in the bosoms of the lowly. As history has almost exclusively confined her walks to the pageantry of courts and the tumult of camps, we have but few records of that true spirit of Christ, which doubtless, in those dark days, sustained thousands, under life's heavy burdens. We occasionally hear their plaintive song of triumph in the dungeon, and their cry of victory, from the stake or the scaffold.

Sextus IV. enraged at the failure of the conspiracy, declared open war against Lorenzo de Medici, without any attempt to disguise his complicity in the plot for his assassination. He excommunicated the whole duchy of Florence, in punishment for the ignominious execution of archbishop Salviati. The Florentine government appealed to the rest of Italy for support, and summoned the Tuscan clergy to a general council. The king of France publicly remonstrated with the pope, against the prosecution of an unjust war. Sextus IV., bent on his purposes, formed an alliance with Ferdinand of Naples, and war again, with even more than ordinary barbarity and horror, swept ill-fated Italy.

The conflict was raging cruelly when Italy, and indeed all Europe, was thrown into consternation by the tidings that the

Turks had landed in great force at Otranto, an important seaport at the southeast extremity of the kingdom of Naples. The city was taken by storm, and the inhabitants perished in a horrible massacre. The sultan, Mahomet II., with twenty-five thousand troops, was encamped on the opposite coast of the Adriatic, ready to be transported across the sea. He had also seven thousand in garrison at Otranto, waiting for the arrival of this army of invasion, then to march vigorously upon Rome. But such was not God's will. Death suddenly terminated the earthly schemes of the Moslem sovereign. Thus was Christendom rescued from the greatest peril to which it had ever been exposed.

The struggling nations of Italy, in their terror, had, for a moment, ceased their fraternal strife, to defend themselves from the common foe. But the death of the sultan, and the consequent withdrawal of his army, was but the signal for the renewal of the insane fratricidal warfare. Sextus IV. was, however, frustrated in his ambitious plans; and a great and sudden disappointment threw him into a paroxysm of passion which hastened his death, in the year 1484.

Innocent the VIII., a voluptuous sinner, the unmarried father of seven children, all of whom he openly acknowledged, succeeded Sextus IV. The hoary debauchee loved ease better than power. Instead of fostering wars, he engaged in the less destructive crimes of extortion and luxurious indulgence. Ferdinand of Naples secured the election of Innocent VIII. to the pontifical throne; and the indolent, sensual pontiff, naturally kind-hearted, for a time manifested his gratitude by a ready compliance with all the wishes of his patron. But Ferdinand, arrogant and brutal, pushed his exactions so far that the pope rebelled, and a war ensued, which was conducted with but little vigor. During the intrigues to which this war led, Lorenzo de Medici, of Florence, married his daughter to one of the natural sons of the pope, and thus paved the way

for the elevation of the family of the Medici to the highest position of ecclesiastical grandeur.

The imbecile pontiff shamefully bestowed the dignity of cardinal upon Giovanni, the second son of Lorenzo, a boy but thirteen years of age. The boy cardinal subsequently became pope Leo X.; perhaps the most renowned pontiff who ever reigned in the Vatican. Lorenzo de Medici was one of the most illustrious men which any age has produced. It is difficult to find any one of his contemporaries who equaled him in the moral beauty of his life. His tastes were pure and ennobling, and in all respects his private character was such as even in this day would be deemed unsullied and attractive. The enthusiasm of his intellectual nature and his exquisite taste for the arts, and the splendid patronage he extended to scholars, architects, and all artists, have associated his name with perhaps the most brilliant epoch in Italian history, and have assigned to him one of the most prominent niches in the temple of fame. Under the sagacious and energetic sway of the Medici, Florence attained its highest pinnacle of power.

Lorenzo de Medici and Innocent VIII. died nearly at the same time. The long anarchy of the feudal ages was passing to a close. From this anarchy the powerful kingdoms of England, France, Spain, and Austria had emerged. Italy, still broken into fragments and distracted with internal strife, was menaced by each of these consolidated and gigantic powers. Italian independence could by no possibility be preserved but by the cordial union and concentration of the Italian states; and this union it was impossible to effect. All the four great kingdoms we have enumerated, were struggling, by all the arts of intrigue and arms, to grasp the Italian provinces, and annex them to their own domains.

Ludovica Sporza, duke of Milan, endeavored to form an Italian confederacy, and sent ambassadors for this purpose to Naples, Florence, Rome, and to the duke of Ferrara. But mutual jealousies were so strong, and selfish ambition so

dominant, that no union could be effected. The Italian states were all hostile to each other, each striving to secure its own aggrandizement by weakening its neighbor. Charles VIII. of France claimed Naples, and sent an army for its conquest, and, with powerful bribes, induced both Milan and Venice to help him.

The French monarch marched, unopposed, through Savoy, Piedmont, Milan, and Tuscany to Rome. The infamous Alexander VI., who was then pope, and in alliance with Naples, finding himself quite unable to defend the city, threw open the gates, and Charles VIII. entered the eternal city, displaying war's most gorgeous pageantry. At three o'clock in the afternoon of a bright and sunny day, the French army, amounting to sixty thousand men, in gay uniform, with polished armor, prancing steeds, silken banners, and pealing music, began to defile into the city. It was long after dark ere the last battalions entered, and ten thousand torches threw wild and lurid gleams over the dark masses of the soldiery, as the very pavements seemed to tremble beneath the tread of their solid columns.

Alfonso II., of Naples, was a cruel tyrant, detested by his people. As the French drew near the Neapolitan frontiers, the execrations of the populace resounded beneath his palace windows; and in terror he abdicated the throne in favor of his son, Ferdinand II., and fled to Sicily. The French marched resistlessly onward, battering down the castles with their formidable artillery, and putting the garrison to the sword. The Neapolitan soldiers fled at their advance, like sheep before wolves. Capua surrendered without striking a blow. As the French monarch approached the city of Naples, Ferdinand II., in despair, abandoned his kingdom, and sought refuge, with his family, in the little island of Ischia. The French entered Naples in triumph, and their banners soon floated over every fortress in the kingdom.

The whole French army, thus triumphant, surrendered