

# JOHN LORD

BEACON LIGHTS OF  
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THE MIDDLE AGES

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**Beacon Lights of History,**  
**Volume 05: The Middle Ages**

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Beacon Lights of History, Volume 05: The Middle Ages:*

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# **John Lord**

## **Beacon Lights of History,**

### **Volume 05: The Middle Ages**

**MOHAMMED.<sup>1</sup>**

**A.D. 570-632**

#### **SARACENIC CONQUESTS**

The most extraordinary man who arose after the fall of the Roman Empire was doubtless Mohammed; and his posthumous influence has been greater than that of any man since Christianity was declared, if we take into account the number of those who have received his doctrines. Even Christianity never had so rapid a spread. More than a sixth part of the human race are the professed followers of the Arabian prophet.

In regard to Mohammed himself, a great change has taken place in the opinions of critics within fifty years. It was the

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<sup>1</sup> Spelled also *Mahomet*, *Mahommed*; but I prefer Mohammed.

fashion half a century ago to speak of this man as a hypocrite, an impostor, even as Antichrist. Now he is generally regarded as a reformer; that is, as a man who introduced into Arabia a religion and a morality superior to what previously existed, and he is regarded as an impostor only so far as he was visionary. Few critics doubt his sincerity. He was no hypocrite, since he himself believed in his mission; and his mission was benevolent,—to turn his countrymen from a gross polytheism to the worship of one God. Although his religion cannot compare with Christianity in purity and loftiness, yet it enforced a higher morality than the old Arabian religions, and assimilated to Christianity in many important respects. The chief fault we have to find in Mohammed was, the propagation of his doctrines by the sword, and the use of wicked means to bring about a good end. The truths he declared have had an immense influence on Asiatic nations, and these have given vitality to his system, if we accept the position that truth alone has vitality.

One remarkable fact stands out for the world to ponder,—that, for more than fourteen hundred years, one hundred and eighty millions (more than a sixth part of the human race) have adopted and cherished the religion of Mohammed; that Christianity never had so astonishing a triumph; and that even the adherents of Christianity, in many countries, have not manifested the zeal of the Mohammedans in most of the countries where it has been acknowledged. Now these startling facts can be explained only on the ground that Mohammedanism has great vital religious

and moral truths underlying its system which appeal to the consciousness of mankind, or else that these truths are so blended with dangerous errors which appeal to depraved passions and interests, that the religion spread in consequence of these errors rather than of the truth itself.

The question to be considered, then, is whether Mohammedanism spread in consequence of its truths or in consequence of its errors.

In order to appreciate the influence of the Arabian prophet, we are first led into the inquiry whether his religion was really an improvement on the old systems which previously prevailed in Arabia. If it was, he must be regarded as a benefactor and reformer, even if we admit the glaring evils of his system, when measured by the purer religion of the Cross. And it then simply becomes a question whether it is better to have a prevalent corrupted system of religion containing many important truths, or a system of downright paganism with few truths at all.

In examining the religious systems of Arabia in the age preceding the advent of the Prophet, it would seem that the most prominent of them were the old doctrines of the Magians and Sabaeans, blended with a gross idolatry and a senseless polytheism. Whatever may have been the faith of the ancient Sabaeen sages, who noted the aspects of the stars, and supposed they were inhabited by angels placed there by Almighty power to supervise and govern the universe, yet history seems to record that this ancient faith was practically subverted, and that the

stars, where were supposed to dwell deities to whom prayers were made, became themselves objects of worship, and even graven images were made in honor of them. Among the Arabs each tribe worshipped a particular star, and set up its particular idol, so that a degrading polytheism was the religion of the land. The object of greatest veneration was the celebrated Black Stone, at Mecca, fabled to have fallen from heaven at the same time with Adam. Over this stone was built the Kaabah, a small oblong stone building, around which has been since built the great mosque. It was ornamented with three hundred and sixty idols. The guardianship of this pagan temple was intrusted to the most ancient and honorable families of Mecca, and to it resorted innumerable pilgrims bringing precious offerings. It was like the shrine of Delphi, as a source of profit to its fortunate guardians.

Thus before Mohammed appeared polytheism was the prevalent religion of Arabia,—a degradation even from the ancient Sabaeen faith. It is true there were also other religions. There were many Jews at Medina; and there was also a corrupted form of Christianity in many places, split up into hostile and wrangling sects, with but little of the spirit of the divine Founder, with innumerable errors and superstitions, so that in no part of the world was Christianity so feeble a light. But the great body of the people were pagans. A marked reform was imperatively needed to restore the belief in the unity of God and set up a higher standard of morality.

It is claimed that Mohammed brought such a reform. He was

born in the year 570, of the family of Hashem and the tribe of Koreish, to whom was intrusted the keeping of the Black Stone. He therefore belonged to the highest Arabian aristocracy. Early left an orphan and in poverty, he was reared in the family of one of his uncles, under all the influences of idolatry. This uncle was a merchant, and the youth made long journeys with him to distant fairs, especially in Syria, where he probably became acquainted with the Holy Scriptures, especially with the Old Testament. In his twenty-fifth year he entered the service of Cadijeh, a very wealthy widow, who sent to the fairs and towns great caravans, which Mohammed accompanied in some humble capacity,—according to the tradition as camel-driver. But his personal beauty, which was remarkable, and probably also his intelligence and spirit, won the heart of this powerful mistress, and she became his wife.

He was now second to none in the capital of Arabia, and great thoughts began to fill his soul. His wife perceived his greatness, and, like Josephine and the wife of Disraeli, forwarded the fortunes of her husband, for he became rich as well as intellectual and noble, and thus had time and leisure to accomplish more easily his work. From twenty-five to forty he led chiefly a contemplative life, spending months together in a cave, absorbed in his grand reflections,—at intervals issuing from his retreat, visiting the marts of commerce, and gaining knowledge from learned men. It is seldom that very great men lead either a life of perpetual contemplation or of perpetual activity. Without



occasional rest, and leisure to mature knowledge, no man can arm himself with the weapons of the gods. To be truly great, a man must blend a life of activity with a life of study,—like Moses, who matured the knowledge he had gained in Egypt amid the deserts of Midian.

With all great men some leading idea rules the ordinary life. The idea which took possession of the mind of Mohammed was the degrading polytheism of his countrymen, the multitude of their idols, the grossness of their worship, and the degrading morals which usually accompany a false theology. He set himself to work to produce a reform, but amid overwhelming obstacles. He talked with his uncles, and they laughed at him. They would not even admit the necessity of a reform. Only Cadijeh listened to him and encouraged him and believed in him. And Mohammed was ever grateful for this mark of confidence, and cherished the memory of his wife in his subsequent apostasy,—if it be true that he fell, like Solomon. Long afterwards, when she was dead, Ayésha, his young and favorite wife, thus addressed him: "Am I not better than Cadijeh? Do you not love me better than you did her? She was a widow, old and ugly." "No, by Allah!" replied the Prophet; "she believed in me when no one else did. In the whole world I had but one friend, and she was that friend." No woman ever retained the affections of a husband superior to herself, unless she had the spirit of Cadijeh,—unless she proved herself his friend, and believed in him. How miserable the life of Jane Carlyle would have been had she not been proud of her husband!

One reason why there is frequent unhappiness in married life is because there is no mutual appreciation. How often have we seen a noble, lofty, earnest man fettered and chained by a frivolous woman who could not be made to see the dignity and importance of the labors which gave to her husband all his real power! Not so with the woman who assisted Mohammed. Without her sympathy and faith he probably would have failed. He told her, and her alone, his dreams, his ecstasies, his visions; how that God at different times had sent prophets and teachers to reveal new truths, by whom religion had been restored; how this one God, who created the heavens and the earth, had never left Himself without witnesses of His truth in the most degenerate times; how that the universal recognition of this sovereign Power and Providence was necessary to the salvation of society. He had learned much from the study of the Talmud and the Jewish Scriptures; he had reflected deeply in his isolated cave; he knew that there was but one supreme God, and that there could be no elevated morality without the sense of personal responsibility to Him; that without the fear of this one God there could be neither wisdom nor virtue.

Hence his soul burned to tell his countrymen his earnest belief in a supreme and personal God, to whom alone prayers should be made, and who alone could rescue by His almighty power. He pondered day and night on this single and simple truth. His perpetual meditations and ascetic habits induced dreams and ecstasies, such as marked primitive monks, and Loyola

in his Manresan cave. He became a visionary man, but most intensely earnest, for his convictions were overwhelming. He fancied himself the ambassador of this God, as the ancient Jewish prophets were; that he was even greater than they, his mission being to remove idolatry,—to his mind the greatest evil under the sun, since it was the root of all vices and follies. Idolatry is either a defiance or a forgetfulness of God,—high treason to the majesty of Heaven, entailing the direst calamities.

At last, one day, in his fortieth year, after he had been shut up a whole month in solitude, so that his soul was filled with ecstasy and enthusiasm, he declared to Cadijeh that the night before, while wrapped in his mantle, absorbed in reverie, a form of divine beauty, in a flood of light, appeared to him, and, in the name of the Almighty who created the heavens and the earth, thus spake: "O, Mohammed! of a truth thou art the Prophet of God, and I am his angel Gabriel." "This," says Carlyle, "is the soul of Islam. This is what Mohammed felt and now declared to be of infinite moment, that idols and formulas were nothing; that the jargon of argumentative Greek sects, the vague traditions of Jews, the stupid routine of Arab idolatry were a mockery and a delusion; that there is but one God; that we must let idols alone and look to Him. He alone is reality; He made us and sustains us. Our whole strength lies in submission to Him. The thing He sends us, be it death even, is good, is the best. We resign ourselves to Him."

Such were the truths which Mohammed, with preternatural

earnestness, now declared,—doctrines which would revolutionize Arabia. And why not? They are the same substantially which Moses declared to those sensual and degraded slaves whom he led out of Egypt,—yea, the doctrines of David and of Job. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." What a grand and all-important truth it is to impress upon people sunk in forgetfulness and sensuality and pleasure-seeking and idle schemes of vanity and ambition, that there is a supreme Intelligence who overrules, and whose laws cannot be violated with impunity; from whom no one can escape, even though he "take the wings of the morning and fly to the uttermost parts of the sea." This is the one truth that Moses sought to plant in the minds of the Jews,—a truth always forgotten when there is slavery to epicurean pleasures or a false philosophy.

Now I maintain that Mohammed, in seeking to impress his degenerate countrymen with the idea of the one supreme God, amid a most degrading and almost universal polytheism, was a great reformer. In preaching this he was neither fanatic nor hypocrite; he was a very great man, and thus far a good man. He does not make an original revelation; he reproduces an old truth,—as old as the patriarchs, as old as Job, as old as the primitive religions,—but an exceedingly important one, lost sight of by his countrymen, gradually lost sight of by all peoples when divine grace is withheld; indeed practically by people in Christian lands in times of great degeneracy. "The fool has said in his heart there is no God;" or, Let there be no God, that we may eat

and drink before we die. Epicureanism, in its pleasures or in its speculations, is virtually atheism. It was so in Greece. It is so with us.

Mohammed was now at the mature age of forty, in the fulness of his powers, in the prime of his life; and he began to preach everywhere that there is but one God. Few, however, believed in him. Why not acknowledge such a fundamental truth, appealing to the intellect as well as the moral sense? But to confess there is a supreme God, who rewards and punishes, and to whom all are responsible both for words and actions, is to imply a confession of sinfulness and the justice of retribution. Those degraded Arabians would not receive willingly such a truth as this, even as the Israelites ever sought to banish it from their hearts and minds, in spite of their deliverance from slavery. The uncles and friends of Mohammed treated his mission with scorn and derision. Nor do I read that the common people heard him gladly, as they listened to the teachings of Christ. Zealously he labored for three years with all classes; and yet in three years of exalted labor, with all his eloquence and fervor and sincerity, he converted only about thirteen persons, one of whom was his slave. Think of such a man declaring such a truth, and only gaining thirteen followers in three years! How sickened must have been his enthusiastic soul! His worldly relatives urged him to silence. Why attack idols; why quarrel with his own interests; why destroy his popularity? Then exclaimed that great hero: "If the sun stood on my right hand, and the moon on my left, ordering

me to hold my peace, I would still declare there is but one God,"—a speech rivalled only by Luther at the Diet of Worms. Why urge a great man to be silent on the very thing which makes him great? He cannot be silent. His truth—from which he cannot be separated—is greater than life or death, or principalities or powers.

Buffeted and ridiculed, still Mohammed persevered. He used at first only moral means. He appealed only to the minds and hearts of the people, encouraged by his few believers and sustained by the fancied voice of that angel who appeared to him in his retreat. But his earnest voice was drowned by discordant noises. He was regarded as a lunatic, a demented man, because he professed to believe in a personal God. The angry mob covered his clothes with dust and ashes. They demanded miracles. But at this time he had only truths to declare,—those saving truths which are perpetual miracles. At last hostilities began. He was threatened and he was persecuted. They laid plots to take his life. He sought shelter in the castle of his uncle, Abu Taleh; but he died. Then Mohammed's wife Cadijeh died. The priests of an idolatrous religion became furious. He had laid his hands on their idols. He was regarded as a disorganizer, an innovator, a most dangerous man. His fortunes became darker and darker; he was hated, persecuted, and alone.

Thus thirteen years passed away in reproach, in persecution, in fear. At last forty picked men swore to assassinate him. Should he remain at Mecca and die, before his mission was accomplished,

or should he fly? He concluded to fly to Medina, where there were Jews, and some nominal converts to Christianity,—a new ground. This was in the year 622, and the flight is called the Hegira,—from which the East dates its era, in the fifty-third year of the Prophet's life. In this city he was cordially welcomed, and he soon found himself surrounded with enthusiastic followers. He built a mosque, and openly performed the rites of the new religion.

At this era a new phase appears in the Prophet's life and teachings. Thus far, until his flight, it would seem that he propagated his doctrines by moral force alone, and that these doctrines, in the main, were elevated. He had earnestly declared his great idea of the unity of God. He had pronounced the worship of images to be idolatrous. He held idolatry of all kinds in supreme abhorrence. He enjoined charity, justice, and forbearance. He denounced all falsehood and all deception, especially in trade. He declared that humility, benevolence, and self-abnegation were the greatest virtues. He commanded his disciples to return good for evil, to restrain the passions, to bridle the tongue, to be patient under injuries, to be submissive to God. He enjoined prayer, fastings, and meditation as a means of grace. He laid down the necessity of rest on the seventh day. He copied the precepts of the Bible in many of their essential features, and recognized its greatest teachers as inspired prophets.

It was during these thirteen years at Mecca, amid persecution and ridicule, and with few outward successes, that he probably

wrote the Koran,—a book without beginning and without end, *disjecta membra*, regardless of all rules of art, full of repetitions, and yet full of lofty precepts and noble truths of morality evidently borrowed from the Jewish Scriptures,—in which his great ideas stand out with singular eloquence and impressiveness. the unity of God, His divine sovereignty, the necessity of prayer, the soul's immortality, future rewards and punishments. His own private life had been blameless. It was plain and simple. For a whole month he did not light a fire to cook his food. He swept his chamber himself and mended his own clothes. His life was that of an ascetic enthusiast, profoundly impressed with the greatness and dignity of his mission. Thus far his greatest error and fault was in the supposition that he was inspired in the same sense as the ancient Jewish prophets were inspired,—to declare the will and the truth of God. Any man leading such a life of contemplative asceticism and retirement is prone to fall into the belief of special divine illumination. It characterized George Fox, the Anabaptists, Ignatius Loyola, Saint Theresa, and even, to some extent, Oliver Cromwell himself. Mohammed's supreme error was that he was the greatest as well as the last of the prophets. This was fanaticism, but he was probably honest in the belief. His brain was turned by dreams, ecstasies, and ascetic devotions. But with all his visionary ideas of his call, his own morality and his teachings had been lofty, and apparently unsuccessful. Possibly he was discouraged with the small progress he had made,—disgusted, irritated, fierce.



Certainly, soon after he was established at Medina, a great change took place in his mode of propagating his doctrines. His great ideas remained the same, but he adopted a new way to spread them. So that I can almost fancy that some Mephistopheles, some form of Satanic agency, some lying Voice whispered to him in this wise: "O Mohammed! of a truth thou art the Prophet of the living God. Thou hast declared the grandest truths ever uttered in Arabia; but see how powerless they are on the minds and hearts of thy countrymen, with all thy eloquence, sincerity, and fervor. By moral means thou hast effected comparatively nothing. Thou hast preached thirteen years, and only made a few converts. Thy truths are too elevated for a corrupt and wicked generation to accept. Even thine own life is in danger. Thou hast been obliged to fly to these barren rocks and sands. Thou hast failed. Why not pursue a new course, and adapt thy doctrines to men as they are? Thy countrymen are wild, fierce, and warlike: why not incite their martial passions in defence of thy doctrines? They are an earnest people, and, believing in the truths which thou now declarest, they will fight for them and establish them by the sword, not merely in Arabia, but throughout the East. They are a pleasure-loving and imaginative people: why not promise the victors of thy faith a sensual bliss in Paradise? They will not be subverters of your grand truths; they will simply extend them, and jealously, if they have a reward in what their passions crave. In short, use the proper means for a great end. The end justifies the means."

Whether influenced by such specious sophistries, or disheartened by his former method, or corrupted in his own heart, as Solomon was, by his numerous wives,—for Mohammed permitted polygamy and practised it himself,—it is certain that he now was bent on achieving more signal and rapid victories. He resolved to adapt his religion to the depraved hearts of his followers. He would mix up truth with error; he would make truth palatable; he would use the means which secure success. It was success he wanted, and success he thus far had not secured. He was ambitious; he would become a mighty spiritual potentate.

So he allowed polygamy,—the vice of Eastern nations from remote periods; he promised a sensual Paradise to those who should die in defence of his religion; he inflamed the imagination of the Arabians with visions of sensual joys. He painted heaven as a land whose soil was the finest wheaten flour, whose air was fragrant with perfumes, whose streams were of crystal water or milk or wine or honey, flowing over beds of musk and camphor,—a glorious garden of fruits and flowers, whose inhabitants were clothed in garments of gold, sparkling with rubies and diamonds, who reclined in sumptuous palaces and silken pavilions, and on couches of voluptuous ease, and who were served with viands which could be eaten without satiety, and liquors which could be drunk without inebriation; yea, where the blissful warrior for the faith should enjoy an unending youth, and where he would be attended by houris, with black and loving eyes, free from all defects, resplendent in beauty and grace, and rejoicing in

perpetual charms.

Such were the views, it is maintained, with which he inflamed the faithful. And, more, he encouraged them to take up arms, and penetrate, as warlike missionaries, to the utmost bounds of the habitable world, in order to convert men to the faith of the one God, whose Prophet he claimed to be. Moreover, he made new and extraordinary "revelations,"—that he had ascended into the seventh heaven and held converse with Gabriel; and he now added to his creed that old lie of Eastern theogonies, that base element of all false religions,—that man can propitiate the Deity by works of supererogation; that man can purchase by ascetic labors and sacrifices his future salvation. This falsity enters largely into Mohammedanism. I need not add how discrepant it is with the cheerful teachings of the apostles, especially to the poor, as seen in the deeds of penance, prayers in the corners of the streets, the ablutions, the fasts, and the pilgrimages to which the faithful are exhorted. And moreover he accommodated his fasts and feasts and holidays and pilgrimages to the old customs of the people, thereby teaching lessons of worldly wisdom. Astarte, the old object of Sabaeen idolatry, was particularly worshipped on a Friday; and this day was made the Mohammedan Sabbath. Again, the month Rhamadán, from time immemorial, had been set apart for fastings; this month the Prophet adopted, declaring that in it he had received his first revelations. Pilgrimages to the Black Stone were favorite forms of penance; and this was perpetuated in the pilgrimages to Mecca.

Thus it would appear that Mohammed, after his flight, accommodated his doctrines to the customs and tastes of his countrymen,—blending with the sublime truths he declared subtle and pernicious errors. The Jesuit missionaries did the same thing in China and Japan, thinking more of the number of their converts than of the truth itself. Expediency—the accepted Jesuitical principle of the end justifying the means—is seen in almost everything in this world which blazes with success. It is seen in politics, in philanthropy, in ecclesiasticism, and in education. There are political Jesuits and philanthropical Jesuits and Protestant Jesuits, as well as Catholic Jesuits and Mohammedan Jesuits. What do you think of a man, wearing the livery of a gospel minister, devoting all his energies to money-making, versed in the ways of the "heathen Chinees,"—"ways that are dark, and tricks that are vain,"—all to succeed better in worldly thrift, using all means for that single end,—is not he practically a Jesuit? I do not mean a Catholic Jesuit, belonging to the Society of Jesus, but popularly what we mean by a Jesuit. What would you think of a college which lowered the standard of education in order to draw students, or selected, as the guardians of its higher interests, those men who would contribute the most money to its funds?

This spirit of expediency Mohammed entertained and utilized, in order to gain success. Most of what is false in Mohammedanism is based on expediency. The end was not lost sight of,—the conversion of his countrymen to the belief in

the unity and sovereignty of God, but it was sought by means which would make them fanatics or pharisees. He was not such a miserable creature as one who seeks to make money by trading on the religious capital of the community; but he did adapt his religion to the passions and habits of the people in order that they might more readily be led to accept it. He listened to that same wicked Voice which afterwards appeared in the guise of an angel of light to mediaeval ritualists. And it is thus that Satan has contrived to pervert the best institutions of the world. The moment good men look to outward and superficial triumphs, to the disregard of inward purity, that moment do they accept the Jesuitical lie of all ages,—“The end justifies the means.”

But the worst thing which the Prophet did in order to gain his end was to make use of the sword. For thirteen years he appealed to conscience. Now he makes it an inducement for men to fight for his great idea. “Different prophets,” said he, in his memorable manifesto, “have been sent by God to illustrate His different attributes: Moses, His providence; Solomon, His wisdom; Christ, His righteousness; but I, the last of the prophets, am sent with the sword. Let those who promulgate my faith enter into no arguments or discussions, but slay all who refuse obedience. Whoever fights for the true faith, whether he fall or conquer, will assuredly receive a glorious reward, for the sword is the key of heaven. All who draw it in defence of the faith shall receive temporal and future blessings. Every drop of their blood, every peril and hardship, will be registered on high as

more meritorious than fasting or prayer. If they fall in battle their sins will be washed away, and they shall be transported into Paradise, to revel in eternal pleasures, and in the arms of black-eyed houris." Thus did he stimulate the martial fanaticism of a warlike and heroic people with the promise of future happiness. What a monstrous expediency,—worse than all the combined usurpations of the popes!

And what was the result? I need not point to the successive conquests of the Saracens with such a mighty stimulus. They were loyal to the truth for which they fought. They never afterwards became idolaters; but their religion was built up on the miseries of nations. To propagate the faith of Mohammed they overran the world. Never were conquests more rapid and more terrible.

At first Mohammed's followers in Medina sallied out and attacked the caravans of Arabia, and especially all belonging to Mecca (the city which had rejected him), until all the various tribes acknowledged the religion of the Prophet, for they were easily converted to a faith which flattered their predatory inclinations and promised them future immunities. The first cavalcade which entered Medina with spoils made Mussulmans of all the inhabitants, and gave Mohammed the control of the city. The battle of Moat gave him a triumphal entrance into Mecca. He soon found himself the sovereign of all Arabia; and when he died, at the age of 63, in the eleventh year after his Hegira, or flight from Mecca, he was the most successful founder

of a religion the world has known, next to Buddha. A religion appealing to truth alone had made only a few converts in thirteen years; a religion which appealed to the sword had made converts of a great nation in eleven years.

It is difficult to ascertain what the private life of the Prophet was in these years of dazzling success. The authorities differ. Some represent him as sunk in a miserable sensuality which shortened his days. But I think this statement may be doubted. He never lost the veneration of his countrymen,—and no veneration can last for a man steeped in sensuality. Even Solomon lost his prestige and popularity when he became vain and sensual. Those who were nearest to the Prophet revered him most profoundly. With his wife Ayésha he lived with great frugality. He was kindly, firm in friendship, faithful and tender in his family, ready to forgive enemies, just in decision. The caliphs who succeeded him, for some time, were men of great simplicity, and sought to imitate his virtues. He was doubtless warlike and fanatical, but conquests such as he and his successors made are incompatible with luxury and effeminacy. He stands arraigned at the bar of eternal justice for perverting truth, for blending it with error, for making use of wicked means to accomplish what he deemed a great end.

I have no patience with Mr. Carlyle, great and venerable as is his authority, for seeming to justify Mohammed in assuming the sword. "I care little for the sword," says this sophistical writer. "I will allow a thing to struggle for itself in this world, with

any sword or tongue or implement it has or can lay hold on. What is better than itself it cannot put away, but only what is worse. In this great life-duel Nature herself is umpire, and can do no wrong," That is, might makes right; only evil perishes in the conflict of principles; whatever prevails is just. In other words, if Mohammedanism, by any means it may choose to use, proves itself more formidable than other religions, then it ought to prevail. Suppose that the victories of the Saracens had extended over Europe, as well as Asia and Africa,—had not been arrested by Charles Martel,—would Carlyle then have preferred Mohammedanism to the Christianity of degenerate nations? Was Mohammedanism a better religion than the Christianity which existed in Asia Minor and in various parts of the Greek empire in the sixth and seventh centuries? Was it a good thing to convert the church of Saint Sophia into a Saracenic mosque, and the city of the later Christian emperors into the capital of the Turks? Is a united Saracenic empire better than a divided, wrangling Christian empire?

But I will not enter upon that discussion. I confine myself to facts. It is certain that Mohammedanism, by means of the sword, spread with marvellous and unprecedented rapidity. The successors of the Prophet carried their conquests even to India. Neither the Syrians nor the Egyptians could cope with men who felt that the sacrifice of life in battle would secure an eternity of bliss. The armies of the Greek emperor melted away before the generals of the caliph. The Cross waned before the Crescent. The



banners of the Moslems floated over the proudest battlements of ancient Roman grandeur.

In the fifth year of the caliph Omar, only seventeen years from the Prophet's flight from Mecca, the conquest of Syria was completed. The Christians were forbidden to build churches, or speak openly of their religion, or sit in the presence of a Mohammedan, or to sell wine, or bear arms, or use the saddle in riding, or have a domestic who had been in the Mohammedan service. The utter prostration of all civil and religious liberty took place in the old scenes of Christian triumph. This was an instance in which persecution proved successful; and because it was successful it is a proof, in the eyes of Carlyle, that the persecuting religion was the better, because it was outwardly the stronger.

The conquest of Egypt rapidly followed that of Syria; and with the fall of Alexandria perished the largest library of the world, the thesaurus of all the intellectual treasures of antiquity.

Then followed the conquest of Persia. A single battle, as in the time of Alexander, decided its fate. The marvel is that the people should have changed their religion; but then, it was Mohammedanism or death. And a still greater marvel it is,—an utter mystery to me,—why that Oriental country should have continued faithful to the new religion. It must have had some elements of vitality almost worth fighting for, and which we do not comprehend.

Nor did Saracenic conquests end until the Arabs of the desert

had penetrated southward into India farther than had Alexander the Great, and westward until they had subdued the northern kingdoms of Africa, and carried their arms to the Pillars of Hercules; yea, to the cities of the Goths in Spain, and were only finally arrested in Europe by the heroism of Charles Martel.

Such were the rapid conquests of the Saracens—and permanent conquests also—in Asia and Africa, under the stimulus of religious fanaticism, until they had reduced thirty-six thousand cities, towns, and castles, and built fourteen thousand mosques.

Now what are the deductions to be logically drawn from these stupendous victories and the consolidation of the various religions of the conquered into the creed of Mohammed,—not repudiated when the pressure was removed, but apparently cherished by one hundred and eighty millions of people for more than a thousand years?

We must take the ground that the religion of Mohammed has marvellous and powerful truths, which we have overlooked and do not understand, which appeal to the heart and conscience, and excite a great enthusiasm,—so great as to stimulate successive generations with an almost unexampled ardor, and to defend which they were ready to die; a religion which has bound diverse nations together for nearly fourteen hundred years. If so, it cannot be abused, or ridiculed, or sneered at, any more than can the dominion of the popes in the Middle Ages, but remains august in impressive mystery to us, and even to future ages.

But if, in comparison with Christianity, it is a corrupt and false

religion, as many assume, then what deductions must we draw from its amazing triumphs? For the fact stares us in the face that it is rooted deeply in a large part of the Eastern world, or, at least, has prevailed victorious for more than a thousand years.

First, we must conclude that the external triumph of a religion, especially among ignorant or wicked people, is not so much owing to the purity and loftiness of its truths, as to its harmony with prevailing errors and corruptions. When Mohammed preached his sublimest doctrines, and appealed to reason and conscience, he converted about a score of people in thirteen years. When he invoked demoralizing passions, he converted all Arabia in eleven years. And does not this startling conclusion seem to be confirmed by the whole history of mankind? How slow the progress of Christianity for two hundred years, except when assisted by direct supernatural influences! How rapid its triumphs when it became adapted to the rude barbaric mind, or to the degenerate people of the Empire! How popular and prevalent and widespread are those religions which we are accustomed to regard as most corrupt! Buddhism and Brahmanism have had more adherents than even Mohammedanism. How difficult it was for Moses and the prophets to keep the Jews from idolatry! What caused the rapid eclipse of faith in the antediluvian world? Why could not Noah establish and perpetuate his doctrines among his own descendants before he was dead? Why was the Socratic philosophy unpopular? Why were the Epicureans so fashionable?

Why was Christianity itself most eagerly embraced when its light was obscured by fables and superstitions? Why did the Roman Empire perish, with all the aid of a magnificent civilization; why did this civilization itself retrograde; why did its art and literature decline? Why did the grand triumphs of Protestantism stop in half a century after Luther delivered his message? What made the mediaeval popes so powerful? What gave such ascendancy to the Jesuits? Why is the simple faith of the primitive Christians so obnoxious to the wise, the mighty, and the noble? What makes the most insidious heresies so acceptable to the learned? Why is modern literature, when fashionable and popular, so antichristian in its tone and spirit? Why have not the doctrines of Luther held their own in Germany, and those of Calvin in Geneva, and those of Cranmer in England, and those of the Pilgrim Fathers in New England? Is it because, as men become advanced in learning and culture, they are theologically wiser than Moses and Abraham and Isaiah?

I do not cite the rapid decline of modern civilized society, in a political or social view, in the most favored sections of Christendom; I do not sing dirges over republican institutions; I would not croak Jeremiads over the changes and developments of mankind. I simply speak of the marvellous similarity which the spread and triumph of Mohammedanism seem to bear to the spread and triumph of what is corrupt and wicked in all institutions and religions since the fall of man. Everywhere it is the frivolous, the corrupt, the false, which seem to be

most prevalent and most popular. Do men love truth, or readily accept it, when it conflicts with passions and interests? Is any truth popular which is arrayed against the pride of reason? When has pure moral truth ever been fashionable? When have its advocates not been reviled, slandered, misrepresented, and persecuted, if it has interfered with the domination of prevailing interests? The lower the scale of pleasures the more eagerly are they sought by the great mass of the people, even in Christian communities. You can best make colleges thrive by turning them into schools of technology, with a view of advancing utilitarian and material interests. You cannot make a newspaper flourish unless you fill it with pictures and scandals, or make it a vehicle of advertisements,—which are not frivolous or corrupt, it is true, but which have to do with merely material interests. Your libraries would never be visited, if you took away their trash. Your Sabbath-school books would not be read, unless you made them an insult to the human understanding. Your salons would be deserted, if you entertained your guests with instructive conversation. There would be no fashionable gatherings, if it were not to display dresses and diamonds. Your pulpits would be unoccupied, if you sought the profoundest men to fill them.

Everything, even in Christian communities, shows that vanities and follies and falsehoods are the most sought, and that nothing is more discouraging than appeals to high intelligence or virtue, even in art. This is the uniform history of the race, everywhere and in all ages. Is it darkness or light which the

world loves? I never read, and I never heard, of a great man with a great message to deliver, who would not have sunk under disappointment or chagrin but for his faith. Everywhere do you see the fascination of error, so that it almost seems to be as vital as truth itself. When and where have not lies and sophistries and hypocrisies reigned? I appeal to history. I appeal to the observation and experience of every thoughtful and candid mind. You cannot get around this truth. It blazes and it burns like the fires of Sinai. Men left to themselves will more and more retrograde in virtue.

What, then, is the hope of the world? We are driven to this deduction,—that if truth in itself is not all-conquering, the divine assistance, given at times to truth itself, as in the early Church, is the only reason why truth conquers. This divine grace, promised in the Bible, has wrought wonders whenever it has pleased the Almighty to bestow it, and only then. History teaches this as impressively as revelation. Christianity itself, unaided, would probably die out in this world. And hence the grand conclusion is, that it is the mysterious, or, as some call it, the supernatural, spirit of Almighty power which is, after all, the highest hope of this world. This is not discrepant with the oldest traditions and theogonies of the East,—the hidden wisdom of ancient Indian and Persian and Egyptian sages, concealed from the vulgar, but really embraced by the profoundest men, before corruptions perverted even their wisdom. This certainly is the earliest revelation of the Bible. This is the power which Moses recognized, and all

the prophets who succeeded him. This is the power which even Mohammed, in the loftiness of his contemplations, more dimly saw, and imperfectly taught to the idolaters around him, and which gives to his system all that was really valuable. Ask not when and where this power shall be most truly felt. It is around us, and above us, and beneath us. It is the mystery and grandeur of the ages. "It is not by might nor by power, but by my spirit," saith the Lord. Man is nothing, his aspirations are nothing, the universe itself is nothing, without the living, permeating force which comes from this supernal Deity we adore, to interfere and save. Without His special agency, giving to His truths vitality, this world would soon become a hopeless and perpetual pandemonium. Take away the necessity of this divine assistance as the one great condition of all progress, as well as the highest boon which mortals seek,—then prayer itself, recognized even by Mohammedans as the loftiest aspiration and expression of a dependent soul, and regarded by prophets and apostles and martyrs as their noblest privilege, becomes a superstition, a puerility, a mockery, and a hopeless dream.

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# CHARLEMAGNE

**A.D. 742-814**

## REVIVAL OF WESTERN EMPIRE

The most illustrious monarch of the Middle Ages was doubtless Charlemagne. Certainly he was the first great statesman, hero, and organizer that looms up to view after the dissolution of the Roman Empire. Therefore I present him as one with whom is associated an epoch in civilization. To him we date the first memorable step which Europe took out of the anarchies of the Merovingian age. His dream was to revive the Empire that had fallen. He was the first to labor, with giant strength, to restore what vice and violence had destroyed. He did not succeed in realizing the great ends to which he aspired, but his aspirations were lofty. It was not in the power of any man to civilize semi-barbarians in a single reign; but if he attempted impossibilities he did not live in vain, since he bequeathed some permanent conquests and some great traditions. He left a great legacy to civilization. His life has not dramatic interest like that of Hildebrand, nor poetic interest like the lives of the leaders

of the Crusades; but it is very instructive. He was the pride of his own generation, and the boast of succeeding ages, "claimed," says Sismondi, "by the Church as a saint, by the French as the greatest of their kings, by the Germans as their countryman, and by the Italians as their emperor."

His remote ancestors, it is said, were ecclesiastical magnates. His grandfather was Charles Martel, who gained such signal victories over the Mohammedan Saracens; his father was Pepin, who was a renowned conqueror, and who subdued the southern part of France, or Gaul. He did not rise, like Clovis, from the condition of a chieftain of a tribe of barbarians; nor, like the founder of his family, from a mayor of the palace, or minister of the Merovingian kings. His early life was spent amid the turmoils and dangers of camps, and as a young man he was distinguished for precocity of talent, manly beauty, and gigantic physical strength. He was a type of chivalry, before chivalry arose. He was born to greatness, and early succeeded to a great inheritance. At the age of twenty-six, in the year 768, he became the monarch of the greater part of modern France, and of those provinces which border on the Rhine. By unwearied activities this inheritance, greater than that of any of the Merovingian kings, was not only kept together and preserved, but was increased by successive conquests, until no so great an empire has ever been ruled by any one man in Europe, since the fall of the Roman Empire, from his day to ours. Yet greater than the conquests of Charlemagne was the greatness of his character. He preserved simplicity and

gentleness amid all the distractions attending his government.

His reign affords a striking contrast to that of all his predecessors of the Merovingian dynasty,—which reigned from the immediate destruction of the Roman Empire. The Merovingian princes, with the exception of Clovis and a few others, were mere barbarians, although converted to a nominal Christianity. Some of them were monsters, and others were idiots. Clotaire burned to death his own son and wife and daughters. Frédegunde armed her assassins with poisoned daggers. "Thirteen sovereigns reigned over the Franks in one hundred and fourteen years, only two of whom attained to man's estate, and not one to the full development of intellectual powers. There was scarcely one who did not live in a state of perpetual intoxication, or who did not rival Sardanapalus in effeminacy, and Commodus in cruelty." As these sovereigns were ruled by priests, their iniquities were glossed over by Gregory of Tours. In *his* annals they may pass for saints, but history consigns them to an infamous immortality.

It is difficult to conceive a more dreary and dismal state of society than existed in France, and in fact over all Europe, when Charlemagne began to reign. The Roman Empire was in ruins, except in the East, where the Greek emperors reigned at Constantinople. The western provinces were ruled by independent barbaric kings. There was no central authority, although there was an attempt of the popes to revive it,—a spiritual rather than a temporal power; a theocracy whose foundation had

been laid by Leo the Great when he established the *jus divinum* principle,—that he was the successor of Peter, to whom were given the keys of heaven and hell. If there was an interesting feature in the times it was this spiritual authority exercised by the bishops of Rome: the most useful and beneficent considering the evils which prevailed,—the reign of brute force. The barbaric chieftains yielded a partial homage to this spiritual power, and it was some check on their rapacity of violence. It is mournful to think that so little of the ancient civilization remained in the eighth century. Its eclipse was total. The shadows of a dark and long night of superstition and ignorance spread over Europe. Law was silenced by the sword. Justinian's glorious legacy was already forgotten. The old mechanism which had kept society together in the fifth century was worn out, broken, rejected. There was no literature, no philosophy, no poetry, no history, and no art. Even the clergy had become ignorant, superstitious, and idle. Forms had taken the place of faith. No great theologians had arisen since Saint Augustine. The piety of the age hid itself in monasteries; and these monasteries were as funereal as society itself. Men despaired of the world, and retreated from it to sing mournful songs. The architecture of the age expressed the sentiments of the age, and was heavy, gloomy, and monotonous. "The barbarians ruthlessly marched over the ruins of cities and palaces, having no regard for the treasures of the classic world, and unmoved by the lessons of its past experience." Rome itself, repeatedly sacked, was a heap

of ruins. No reconstruction had taken place. Gardens and villas were as desolate as the ruined palaces, which were the abodes of owls and spiders. The immortal creations of the chisel were used to prop up old crumbling walls. The costly monuments of senatorial pride were broken to pieces in sport or in caprice, and those structures which had excited the admiration of ages were pulled down that their material might be used in erecting tasteless edifices. Literature shared the general desolation. The valued manuscripts of classical ages were mutilated, erased, or burned. The monks finished the destruction which the barbarians began. Ignorance as well as anarchy veiled Europe in darkness. The rust of barbarism became harder and thicker. The last hope of man had fled, and glory was succeeded by shame. Even slavery, the curse of the Roman Empire, was continued by the barbarians; only, brute force was not made subservient to intellect, but intellect to brute force. The descendants of ancient patrician families were in bondage to barbarians. The age was the jubilee of monsters. Assassination was common, and was unavenged by law. Every man was his own avenger of crime, and his bloody weapons were his only law.

Nor were there seen among the barbaric chieftains the virtues of ancient Pagan Rome and Greece, for Christianity was nominal. War was universal; for the barbarians, having no longer the Romans to fight, fought among themselves. There were incessant irruptions of different tribes passing from one country to another, in search of plunder and pillage. There was

no security of life or property, and therefore no ambition for acquisition. Men hid themselves in morasses, in forests, on the tops of inaccessible hills, and amid the recesses of valleys, for violence was the rule and not the exception. Even feudalism was not then born, and still less chivalry. We find no elevated sentiments. The only refuge for the miserable was in the Church, and the Church was governed by narrow and ignorant priests. A cry of despair went up to heaven among the descendants of the old population. There was no commerce, no travel, no industries, no money, no peace. The chastisement of Almighty Power seems to have been sent on the old races and the new alike. It was a desolation greater than that predicted by Jeremy the prophet. The very end of the world seemed to be at hand. Never in the old seats of civilization was there such a disintegration; never such a combination of evils and miseries. And there appeared to be no remedy: nothing but a long night of horrors and sufferings could be predicted. Gaul, or France, was the scene of turbulence, invasions, and anarchies; of murders, of conflagrations, and of pillage by rival chieftains, who sought to divide its territories among themselves. The people were utterly trodden down. England was the battle-field of Danes, Saxons, and Celts, invaded perpetually, and split up into petty Saxon kingdoms. The roads were infested with robbers, and agriculture was rude. The people lived in cabins, dressed themselves in skins, and fed on the coarsest food. Spain was invaded by Saracens, and the Gothic kingdoms succumbed to these fierce invaders. Italy

was portioned out among different tribes, Gothic and Slavonic. But the prevailing races in Europe were Germanic (who had conquered both the Celts and the Romans), the Goths in Spain, the Franks and Burgundians in France, the Lombards in Italy, the Saxons in England.

What a commentary on the imperial government of the Caesars!—that government which, with all its mechanisms and traditions, lasted scarcely four hundred years. Was there ever, in the whole history of the world, so sudden and mournful a change from civilization to barbarism,—and this in spite of art, science, law, and Christianity itself? Were there no conservative forces in that imposing Empire? Why did society constantly decline for four hundred years, with that civilization which was its boast and hope? Oh, ye optimists, who talk so glibly about the natural and necessary progress of humanity, why was the Roman Empire swept away, with all its material glories, to give place to such a state of society as I have just briefly described?

And yet men should arise in due time, after the punishment of five centuries of crime and violence, wretchedness and despair, to reconstruct, not from the old Pagan materials of Greece and Rome, but with the fresh energies of new races, aided and inspired by the truths of the everlasting gospel. The infancy of the new races, sprung however from the same old Aryan stock, passed into vigorous youth when Charlemagne appeared. From him we date the first decided impulse given to the Gothic civilization. He was the morning star of European hopes and

aspirations.

Let us now turn to his glorious deeds. What were the services he rendered to Europe and Christian civilization?

It was necessary that a truly great man should arise in the eighth century, if the new forces of civilization were to be organized. To show what he did for the new races, and how he did it, is the historian's duty and task in describing the reign of Charlemagne,—sent, I think, as Moses was, for a providential mission, in the fulness of time, after the slaveries of three hundred years, which prepared the people for labor and industry. Better was it that they should till the lands of allodial proprietors in misery and sorrow, attacked and pillaged, than to wander like savages in forests and morasses in quest of a precarious support, or in great predatory bands, as they did in the fourth and fifth centuries, when they ravaged the provinces of the falling Empire. Nothing was wanted but their consolidation under central rule in order to repel aggressors. And that is what Charlemagne attempted to do.

He soon perceived the greatness of the struggle to which he was destined, and he did not flinch from the contest which has given him immortality. He comprehended the difficulties which surrounded him and the dangers which menaced him.

The great perils which threatened Europe were from unsubdued barbarians, who sought to replunge it into the miseries which the great irruptions had inflicted three hundred years before. He therefore bent all the energies of his mind and



all the resources of his kingdom to arrest these fresh waves of inundation. And so long was his contest with Saxons, Avares, Lombards, and other tribes and races that he is chiefly to be contemplated as a man who struggled against barbarism. And he fought them, not for excitement, not for the love of fighting, not for useless conquests, not for military fame, not for aggrandizement, but because a stern necessity was laid upon him to protect his own territories and the institutions he wished to conserve.

Of these barbarians there was one nation peculiarly warlike and ferocious, and which cherished an inextinguishable hatred not merely of the Franks, but of civilization itself. They were obstinately attached to their old superstitions, and had a great repugnance to Christianity. They were barbarians, like the old North American Indians, because they determined to be so; because they loved their forests and the chase, indulged in amusements which were uncertain and dangerous, and sought for nothing beyond their immediate inclinations. They had no territorial divisions, and abhorred cities as prisons of despotism. But, like all the Germanic barbarians, they had interesting traits. They respected women; they were brave and daring; they had a dogged perseverance, and a noble passion for personal independence. But they were nevertheless the enemies of civilization, of a regular and industrious life, and sought plunder and revenge. The Franks and Goths were once like them, before the time of Clovis; but they had made settlements, they

tilled the land, and built villages and cities: they were partially civilized, and were converted to Christianity. But these new barbarians could not be won by arts or the ministers of religion. These people were the Saxons, and inhabited those parts of Germany which were bounded by the Rhine, the Oder, the North Sea, and the Thuringian forests. They were fond of the sea, and of daring expeditions for plunder. They were a kindred race to those Saxons who had conquered England, and had the same elements of character. They were poor, and sought to live by piracy and robbery. They were very dangerous enemies, but if brought under subjection to law, and converted to Christianity, might be turned into useful allies, for they had the materials of a noble race.

With such a people on his borders, and every day becoming more formidable, what was Charlemagne's policy? What was he to do? The only thing to the eye of that enlightened statesman was to conquer them, if possible, and add their territories to the Frankish Empire. If left to themselves, they might have conquered the Franks. It was either anvil or hammer. There could be no lasting peace in Europe while these barbarians were left to pursue their depredations. A vigorous warfare was imperative, for, unless subdued, a disadvantageous war would be carried on near the frontiers, until some warrior would arise among them, unite the various chieftains, and lead his followers to successful invasion. Charlemagne knew that the difficult and unpleasant work of subjugation must be done by somebody, and

he was unwilling to leave the work to enervated successors. The work was not child's play. It took him the best part of his life to accomplish it, and amid great discouragements. Of his fifty-three expeditions, eighteen were against the Saxons. As soon as he had cut off one head of the monster, another head appeared. How allegorical of human labor is that old fable of the Hydra! Where do man's labors cease? Charlemagne fought not only amid great difficulties, but perpetual irritations. The Saxons cheated him; they broke their promises and their oaths. When beaten, they sued for peace; but the moment his back was turned, they broke out in new insurrections. The fame of Caesar chiefly rests on his eight campaigns in Gaul. But Caesar had the disciplined Legions of Rome to fight with. Charlemagne had no such disciplined troops. Yet he had as many difficulties to surmount as Caesar,—rugged forests to penetrate, rapid rivers to cross, morasses to avoid, and mountains to climb. It is a very difficult thing to subdue even savages who are desperate, determined, and united.

Charlemagne fought the Saxons for thirty-three years. Though he never lost a battle, they still held out. At first he was generous and forgiving, for he was more magnanimous than Caesar; but they could not be won by kindness. He was obliged to change his course, and at last was as summary as Oliver Cromwell in Ireland. He is even accused of cruelties. But war in the hands of masters has no quarter to give, and no tears to shed. It was necessary to conquer the Saxons, and Charlemagne used the requisite means.

Sometimes the harshest measures will most speedily effect the end. Did our fathers ever dream of compromise with treacherous and hostile Indians? War has a horrid maxim,—that "nothing is so successful as success." Charlemagne, at last, was successful. The Saxons were so completely subdued at the end of thirty-three years, that they never molested civilized Europe again. They became civilized, like the once invading Celts and Goths; and they even embraced the religion of the conquerors. They became ultimately the best people in Europe,—earnest, honest, and brave. They formed great kingdoms and states, and became new barriers against fresh inundations from the North and East. The Saxons formed the nucleus of the great German Empire (or were incorporated with it) which arose in the Middle Ages, and which to-day is the most powerful in Europe, and the least corrupted by the vices of a luxurious life. The descendants of those Saxons are among the most industrious and useful settlers in the New World.

There was one mistake which Charlemagne made in reference to them. He forced their conversion to a nominal Christianity. He immersed them in the rivers of Saxony, whether they would or no. He would make them Christians in his way. But then, who does not seek to make converts in his way, whether enlightened or not? When have the principles of religious toleration been understood? Did the Puritans understand them, with all their professions? Do we tolerate, in our hearts, those who differ from us? Do not men look daggers, though they dare not use them?

If we had the power, would we not seek to produce conformity with our notions, like Queen Elizabeth, or Oliver Cromwell, or Archbishop Laud? There is not perhaps a village in America where a true catholicism reigns. There is not a spot upon the globe where there is not some form of religious persecution. Nor is there anything more sincere than religious bigotry. And when people have not fundamental principles to fight about, they will fight about technicalities and matters of no account, and all the more bitterly sometimes when the objects of contention are not worth fighting about at all,—as in forms of worship, or baptism. Such is the weakness of human nature. Charlemagne was no exception to the race. But if he wished to make Christians in his way, he was, on the whole, enlightened. He caused the young Saxons, whom he baptized and marked with the sign of the Cross, to be educated. He built monasteries and churches in the conquered territories. He recognized this,—that Christianity, whatever it be, is the mightiest power of the world; and he bore his testimony in behalf of the intellectual dignity of the clergy in comparison with other classes. He encouraged missions as well as schools.

There was another Germanic tribe at that time which he held in great alarm, but which he did not attack, since they were not immediately dangerous. This tribe or race was the Norman, just then beginning their ravages,—pirates in open boats. They had dared to enter a port in Narbonensis Gaul for purposes of plunder. Some took them for Africans, and others for British

merchants. Nay, said Charlemagne, they are not merchants, but cruel enemies; and he covered his face with his iron hands and wept like a child. He did not fear these barbarians, but he wept when he foresaw the evil they would do when he was dead. "I weep," said he, "that they should dare almost to land on my shores, in my lifetime." These Normans escaped him. They conquered and they founded kingdoms. But they did not replunge Europe in darkness. A barrier had been made against their inundation. The Saxon conquest was that barrier. Moreover, the Normans were the noblest race of barbarians which then roamed through the forests of Germany, or skirted the shores of Scandinavia. They had grand natural traits of character. They were poetic, brave, and adventurous. They were superior to the Saxons and the Franks. When converted, they were the great allies of the Pope, and early became civilized. To them we trace the noblest development of Gothic architecture. They became great scholars and statesmen. They were more refined by nature than the Saxons, and avoided their gluttonous habits. In after times they composed the flower of European chivalry. It was providential that they were not subdued,—that they became the leading race in Northern Europe. To them we trace the mercantile greatness of England, for they were born sailors. They never lost their natural heroism, or love of power.

The next important conquest of Charlemagne was that of the Avars,—a tribe of the Huns, of Slavonic origin. They are represented as very hideous barbarians, and only thought of

plunder. They never sought to reconstruct. There seemed to be no end of their invasions from the time of Attila. They were more formidable for their numbers and destructive ravages than for their military skill. There was a time, however, when they threatened the combined forces of Germany and Rome; but Europe was delivered by the battle of Poitiers,—the bloodiest battle on record,—when they seemed to be annihilated. But they sprang up again, in new invasions, in the ninth century. Had they conquered, civilization would have been crushed out. But Charlemagne was successful against them, and from that time to this they were shut out from western Europe. They would be formidable now, for the Russians are the descendants of these people, were it not for the barrier raised against them by the Germans. The necessities of Europe still require the vast military strength and organization of Germany, not to fight France, but to awe Russia. Napoleon predicted that Europe would become either French or Cossack; but there is little probability of Russian aggressions in Europe, so long as Russia is held in check by Germany.

Charlemagne had now delivered France and Germany from external enemies. He then turned his arms against the Saracens of Spain. This was the great mistake of his life. Yet every one makes mistakes, however great his genius. Alexander made the mistake of pushing his arms into India; and Napoleon made a great blunder in invading Russia. Even Caesar died at the right time for his military fame, for he was on the point of attempting

the conquest of Parthia, where, like Crassus, he would probably have perished, or have lost his army. Needless conquests seem to be impossible in the moral government of God, who rules the fate of war. Conquests are only possible when civilization seems to require them. In seeking to invade Spain, Charlemagne warred against a race from whom Europe had nothing more to fear. His grandfather, Charles Martel, had arrested the conquests of the Saracens; and they were quiet in their settlements in Spain, and had made considerable attainments in science and literature. Their schools of medicine and their arts were in advance of the rest of Europe. They were the translators of Aristotle, who reigned in the rising universities during the Middle Ages. As this war was unnecessary, Providence seemed to rebuke Charlemagne. His defeat at Roncesvalles was one of the most memorable events in his military history. Prodigies of valor were wrought by him and his gallant Paladins. The early heroic poetry of the Middle Ages has commemorated his exploits, as well as those of his nephew Roland, to whom some writers have ascribed the origin of Chivalry. But the Frankish forces were signally defeated amid the passes of the Pyrenees; and it was not until after several centuries that the Gothic princes of Spain shook off the yoke of their Saracenic conquerors, and drove them from Europe.

The Lombard wars of Charlemagne are the last to which I allude. These were undertaken in defence of the Church, to rescue his ally the Pope. The Lombards belonged to the great



Germanic family, but they were unfriendly to the Pope and to the Church. They stood out against the Empire, which was then the chief hope of Europe and of civilization. They would have reduced the Pope to insignificance and seized his territories, without uniting Italy. So Charlemagne, like his father Pepin, lent his powerful aid to the Roman bishop, and the Lombards were easily subdued. This conquest, although the easiest which he ever made, most flattered his pride. Lombardy was not only joined to his Empire, but he received unparalleled honors from the Pope, being crowned by him Emperor of the West.

It was a proud day when, in the ancient metropolis of the world, and in the fulness of his fame, Pope Leo III. placed the crown of Augustus upon Charlemagne's brow, and gave to him, amid the festivities of Christmas, his apostolic benediction. His dominions now extended from Catalonia to the Bohemian forests, embracing Germany, France, the Netherlands, Italy, and the Spanish main,—the largest empire which any one man has possessed since the fall of the Roman Empire. What more natural than for Charlemagne to feel that he had restored the Western Empire? What more natural than that he should have taken the title, still claimed by the Austrian emperor, in one sense his legitimate successor,—Kaiser, or Caesar? In the possession of such enormous power, he naturally dreamed of establishing a new universal military monarchy like that of the Romans,—as Charles V. dreamed, and Napoleon after him. But this is a dream that Providence has rebuked among all successive conquerors.

There may have been need of the universal monarchy of the Caesars, that Christianity might spread in peace, and be protected by a reign of law and order. This at least is one of the platitudes of historians. Froude himself harps on it in his life of Caesar. Historians are fond of exalting the glories of imperialism, and everybody is dazzled by the splendor and power of ancient Roman emperors. They do not, I think, sufficiently consider the blasting influence of imperialism on the life of nations,—how it dries up the sources of renovation, how it necessarily withers literature and philosophy, how nothing can thrive under it but pomp and material glories, how it paralyzes all virtuous impulses, how it kills all enthusiasm, how it crushes out all hope and lofty aspirations, how it makes slaves of its best subjects, how it fills the earth with fear, how it drains national resources to support standing armies, how it mocks all enterprises which do not receive imperial approbation, how everything is concentrated to reflect the glory of one man or family; how impossible, under its withering shade, is manly independence, or the free expression of opinions or healthy growth; how it buries up, under its armies, discontents and aspirations alike, and creates nothing but machinery which must ultimately wear out and leave a world in ruins, with nothing stable to take its place. Law and order are good things, the preservation of property is desirable, the punishment of crime is necessary; but there are other things which are valuable also. Nothing is so valuable as the preservation of national life; nothing is so healthy as scope for

energies; nothing is so contemptible and degrading as universal sycophancy to official rule. There are no tyrants more oppressive than the tools of absolute power. See in what a state imperialism left the Roman Empire when it fell. There were no rallying forces; there was no resurrection of heroes. Vitality had fled. Where would Turkey be to-day without the European powers, if the Sultan's authority were to fall? It would be in the state of ancient Babylon or Persia when those empires fell.

There is another side to imperialism besides dreaded anarchies. Moreover, the whole progress of civilization has been counter to it. The fiats of eternal justice have pronounced against it, because it is antagonistic to the dignity of man and the triumphs of reason. I would not fall in with the cant of the dignity of man, because there is no dignity to man without aid from God Almighty through His spirit and the message he has sent in Christianity. But there is dignity in man with the aid of a regenerating gospel. Some people talk of the triumphs of Christianity under the Roman emperors; but see how rapidly it was corrupted by them when they sought the aid of its institutions to bolster up their power. The power of Christianity is in its truths; in its religion, and not in its forms and institutions, in its inventions to uphold the arms of despotism and the tools of despotism. It is, and it was, and it will be through all the ages the great power of the world, against which it is vain to rebel. And that government is really the best which unfetters its spiritual influence, and

encourages it; and not that government which seeks to perpetuate its corrupt and worldly institutions. The Roman emperors made Christianity an institution, and obscured its truths. And perhaps that is one reason why Providence permitted their despotism to pass away,—preferring the rude anarchy of the Germanic nations to the dead mechanism of a lifeless Church and imperial rottenness. Imperialism must ever end in rottenness. And that is one reason why the heart of Christendom—I mean the people of Europe, in its enlightened and virtuous sections—has ever opposed imperialism. The progress has been slow, but marked, towards representative governments,—not the reign of the people directly, but of those whom they select to represent them. The victory has been nearly gained in England. In France the progress has been uniform since the Revolution. Napoleon revived, or sought to revive, the imperialism of Rome. He failed. There is nothing which the French now so cordially detest, since their eyes have been opened to the character and ends of that usurper, as his imperialism. It cannot be revived any more easily than the oracles of Dodona. Even in Germany there are dreadful discontents in view of the imperialism which Bismarck, by the force of successful wars, has seemingly revived. The awful standing armies are a menace to all liberty and progress and national development. In Italy itself there is the commencement of constitutional authority, although it is united under a king. The great standing warfare of modern times is constitutional authority against the absolute power of kings and emperors. And

the progress has been on the side of liberty everywhere, with occasional drawbacks, such as when Louis Napoleon revived the accursed despotism of his uncle, and by the same means,—a standing army and promises of military glory.

Hence, in the order of Providence, the dream of Charlemagne as to unbounded military aggrandizement could not be realized. He could not revive the imperialism of Rome or Persia. No man will ever arise in Europe who can re-establish it, except for a brief period. It will be rebuked by the superintending Power, because it is fatal to the highest development of nations, because all its glories are delusory, because it sows the seeds of ruin. It produces that very egotism, materialism, and sensuality, that inglorious rest and pleasure, which, as everybody concedes, prepared the way for violence.

And hence Charlemagne's empire went to pieces as soon as he was dead. There was nothing permanent in his conquests, except those made against barbarism. He was raised up to erect barriers against fresh inroads of barbarians. His whole empire was finally split up into petty sovereignties. In one sense he founded States, "since he founded the States which sprang up from the dismemberment of his empire. The kingdoms of Germany, Italy, France, Burgundy, Lorraine, Navarre, all date to his memorable reign." But these mediaeval kingdoms were feudal; the power of the kings was nominal. Government passed from imperialism into the hands of nobles. The government of Europe in the Middle Ages was a military aristocracy, only

powerful as the interests of the people were considered. Kings and princes did not make much show, except in the trappings of royalty,—in gorgeous dresses of purple and gold, to suit a barbaric taste,—in the insignia of power without its reality. The power was among the aristocracy, who, it must be confessed, ground down the people by a hard feudal rule, but who did not grind the souls out of them, like the imperialism of absolute monarchies, with their standing armies. Under them the feudal nobles of Europe at length recuperated. Virtues were born everywhere,—in England, in France, in Germany, in Holland,—which were a savor of life unto life: loyalty, self-respect, fidelity to covenants, chivalry, sympathy with human misery, love of home, rural sports, a glorious rural life, which gave stamina to character,—a material which Christianity could work upon, and kindle the latent fires of freedom, and the impulses of a generous enthusiasm. It was under the fostering influences of small, independent chieftains that manly strength and organized social institutions arose once more,—the reserved power of unconquerable nations. Nobody hates feudalism—in its corruptions, in its oppressions—more than I do. But it was the transition stage from the anarchy which the collapse of imperialism produced to the constitutional governments of our times, if we could forget the absolute monarchies which flourished on the breaking up of feudalism, when it became a tyranny and a mockery, but which absolute monarchies flourished only one or two hundred years,—a sort of necessity in the development of nations to check the insolence

and overgrown power of nobles, but after all essentially different from the imperialism of Caesar or Napoleon, since they relied on the support of nobles and municipalities more than on a standing army; yea, on votes and grants from parliaments to raise money to support the army,—certainly in England, as in the time of Elizabeth. The Bourbons, indeed, reigned without grants from the people or the nobility, and what was the logical result?—a French Revolution! Would a French Revolution have been possible under the Roman Caesars?

But I will not pursue this gradual development of constitutional government from the anarchies which arose out of the fall of the Roman Empire,—just the reverse of what happened in the history of Rome; I say no more of the imperialism which Charlemagne sought to restore, but was not permitted by Providence, and which, after all, was the dream of his latter days, when, like Napoleon, he was intoxicated by power and brilliant conquests; and I turn to consider briefly his direct effects in civilization, which showed his great and enlightened mind, and on which his fame in no small degree rests.

Charlemagne was no insignificant legislator. His Capitularies may not be equal to the laws of Justinian in natural justice, but were adapted to his times and circumstances. He collected the scattered codes, so far as laws were codified, of the various Germanic nations, and modified them. He introduced a great Christian element into his jurisprudence. He made use of the canons of the Church. His code is more ecclesiastical than that

of Theodosius even, the last great Christian emperor. But in his day the clergy wielded great power, and their ordinances and decisions were directed to society as it was. The clergy were the great jurists of their day. The spiritual courts decided matters of great importance, and took cognizance of cases which were out of the jurisdiction of temporal courts. Charlemagne recognized the value of these spiritual courts, and aided them. He had no quarrels with ecclesiastics, nor was he jealous of their power. He allied himself with it. He was a friend of the clergy. One of the peculiarities of all the Germanic laws, seen especially in those of Ina and Alfred, was pecuniary compensation for crime: fifty shillings, in England, would pay for the loss of a foot, and twenty for a nose and four for a tooth; thus recognizing a principle seen in our times in railroad accidents, though not recognized in our civil laws in reference to crimes. This system of compensation Charlemagne retained, which perhaps answered for his day.

He was also a great administrator. Nothing escaped his vigilance. I do not read that he made many roads, or effected important internal improvements. The age was too barbarous for the development of national industries,—one of the main things which occupy modern statesmen and governments. But whatever he did was wise and enlightened. He rewarded merit; he made an alliance with learned men; he sought out the right men for important posts; he made the learned Alcuin his teacher and counsellor; he established libraries and schools; he built convents and monasteries; he gave encouragement to men of



great attainments; he loved to surround himself with learned men; the scholars of all countries sought his protection and patronage, and found him a friend. Alcuin became one of the richest men in his dominions, and Englebert received one of his daughters in marriage. Napoleon professed a great admiration for Charlemagne, although Frederic II. was his model sovereign. But how differently Napoleon acted in this respect! Napoleon was jealous of literary genius. He hated literary men. He rarely invited them to his table, and was constrained in their presence. He drove them out of the kingdom even. He wanted nothing but homage,—and literary genius has no sympathy with brute force, or machinery, or military exploits. But Charlemagne, like Peter the Great, delighted in the society of all who could teach him anything. He was a tolerably learned man himself, considering his life of activity. He spoke Latin as fluently as his native German, and it is said that he understood Greek. He liked to visit schools, and witness the performances of the boys; and, provided they made proficiency in their studies, he cared little for their noble birth. He was no respecter of persons. With wrath he reproved the idle. He promised rewards to merit and industry.

The most marked feature of his reign, outside his wars, was his sympathy with the clergy. Here, too, he differed from Napoleon and Frederic II. Mr. Hallam considers his alliance with the Church the great error of his reign; but I believe it built up his throne. In his time the clergy were the most influential people of the Empire and the most enlightened; but at that

time the great contest of the Middle Ages between spiritual and temporal authority had not begun. Ambrose, indeed, had rebuked Theodosius, and set in defiance the empress when she interfered with his spiritual functions; and Leo had laid the corner-stone of the Papacy by instituting a divine right to his decrees. But a Hildebrand and a Becket had not arisen to usurp the prerogatives of their monarchs. Least of all did popes then dream of subjecting the temporal powers and raising the spiritual over them, so as to lead to issues with kings. That was a later development in the history of the papacy. The popes of the eighth and ninth centuries sought to heal disorder, to punish turbulent chieftains, to sustain law and order, to establish a tribunal of justice to which the discontented might appeal. They sought to conserve the peace of the world. They sought to rule the Church, rather than the world. They aimed at a theocratic ministry,—to be the ambassadors of God Almighty,—to allay strife and division.

The clergy were the friends of order and law, and they were the natural guardians of learning. They were kind masters to the slaves,—for slavery still prevailed. That was an evil with which the clergy did not grapple; they would ameliorate it, but did not seek to remove it. Yet they shielded the unfortunate and the persecuted and the poor; they gave the only consolation which an iron age afforded. The Church was gloomy, ascetic, austere, like the cathedrals of that time. Monks buried themselves in crypts; they sang mournful songs; they saw nothing but poverty and misery, and they came to the relief in a funereal way. But

they were not cold and hard and cruel, like baronial lords. Secular lords were rapacious, and ground down the people, and mocked and trampled upon them; but the clergy were hospitable, gentle, and affectionate. They sympathized with the people, from whom they chiefly sprang. They had their vices, but those vices were not half so revolting as those of barons and knights. Intellectually, the clergy were at all times the superiors of these secular lords. They loved the peaceful virtues which were generated in the consecrated convent. The passions of nobles urged them on to perpetual pillage, injustice, and cruelty. The clergy only quarrelled among themselves. Their vices were those of envy, and perhaps of gluttony; but they were not public robbers. They were the best farmers of their times; they cultivated lands, and made them attractive by fruits and flowers. They were generally industrious; every convent was a beehive, in which various kinds of manufactures were produced. The monks aspired even to be artists. They illuminated manuscripts, as well as copied them; they made tapestries and beautiful vestments. They were a peaceful and useful set of men, at this period outside their spiritual functions; they built grand churches; they had fruitful gardens; they were exceedingly hospitable. Every monastery was an inn, as well as a beehive, to which all travellers resorted, and where no pay was exacted. It was a retreat for the unfortunate, which no one dared assail. And it was vocal with songs and anthems.

The clergy were not only thus general benefactors in an age of

turbulence and crime, in spite of all their narrowness and spiritual pride and ghostly arts and ambition for power, but they lent a helping hand to the peasantry. The Church was democratic, and enabled the poor to rise according to their merits, while nobles combined to crush them or keep them in an ignoble sphere. In the Church, the son of a murdered peasant could rise according to his deserts; but if he followed a warrior to the battle-field, no virtues, no talents, no bravery could elevate him,—he was still a peasant, a low-born menial. If he entered a monastery, he might pass from office to office until as a mitred abbot he would become the master of ten thousand acres, the counsellor of kings, the equal of that proud baron in whose service his father spent his abject life. The great Hildebrand was the son of a carpenter. The Church ever recognized, what feudality did not,—the claims of man as man; and enabled peasants' sons, if they had abilities and virtues, to rise to proud positions,—to be the patrons of the learned, the companions of princes, the ministers of kings.

And that is the reason why Charlemagne befriended the Church and elevated it, because its influence was civilizing. He sought to establish among the clergy a counterbalancing power to that of nobles. Who can doubt that the influence of the Church was better than that of nobles in the Middle Ages? If it ground down society by a spiritual yoke, that yoke was necessary, for the rude Middle Ages could be ruled only by fear. What fear more potent than the destruction of the soul in a future life! It was by this weapon—excommunication—that Europe was

governed. We may abhor it, but it was the great idea of Mediaeval Europe, which no one could resist, and which kept society from dissolution. Charlemagne may have erred in thus giving power and consideration to the clergy, in view of the subsequent encroachments of the popes. But he never anticipated the future quarrels between his successors and the popes, for the popes were not then formidable as the antagonists of kings. I believe his policy was the best for Europe, on the whole. The infancy of the Gothic races was long, dark, dreary, and unfortunate, but it prepared them for the civilization which they scorned.

Such were the services which this great sovereign rendered to his times and to Europe. He probably saved it from renewed barbarism. He was the great legislator of the Middle Ages, and the greatest friend—after Constantine and Theodosius—of which the Church can boast. With him dawned the new civilization. He brought back souvenirs of Rome and the Empire. Not for himself did he live, but for the welfare of the nations he governed. It was his example which Alfred sought to imitate. Though a warrior, he saw something greater than the warrior's excellence. It is said he was eloquent, like Julius Caesar. He loved music and all the arts. In his palace at Aix-la-Chapelle were sung the songs of the earliest poets of Germany. He took great pains to introduce the Gregorian chant. He was simple in dress, and only on rare occasions did he indulge in parade. He was temperate in eating and drinking, as all the famous warriors have been. He absolutely abhorred drunkenness, the great vice of the Northern

nations. During meals he listened to the lays of minstrels or the readings of his secretaries. He took unwearied pains with the education of his daughters, and he was so fond of them that they even accompanied him in his military expeditions. He was not one of those men that Gibbon appreciated; but his fame is steadily growing, after a lapse of a thousand years. His whole appearance was manly, cheerful, and dignified. His countenance reflected a child-like serenity. He was one of the few men, like David, who was not spoiled by war and flatteries. Though gentle, he was subject to fits of anger, like Theodosius; but he did not affect anger, like Napoleon, for theatrical effect. His greatness and his simplicity, his humanity and his religious faith, are typical of the Germanic race. He died A.D. 814, after a reign of half a century, lamented by his own subjects and to be admired by succeeding generations. Hallam, though not eloquent generally, has pronounced his most beautiful eulogy, "written in the disgraces and miseries of succeeding times. He stands alone like a rock in the ocean, like a beacon on a waste. His sceptre was the bow of Ulysses, not to be bent by a weaker hand. In the dark ages of European history, his reign affords a solitary resting-place between two dark periods of turbulence and ignominy, deriving the advantage of contrast both from that of the preceding dynasty and of a posterity for whom he had founded an empire which they were unworthy and unequal to maintain."

To such a tribute I can add nothing. His greatness consists

in this, that, born amidst barbarism, he was yet the friend of civilization, and understood its elemental principles, and struggled forty-seven years to establish them,—failing only because his successors and subjects were not prepared for them, and could not learn them until the severe experience of ten centuries, amidst disasters and storms, should prove the value of the "old basal walls and pillars" which remained unburied amid the despised ruins of antiquity, and show that no structure could adequately shelter the European nations which was not established by the beautiful union of German vigor with Christian art,—by the combined richness of native genius with those immortal treasures which had escaped the wreck of the classic world.

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# **HILDEBRAND**

**A.D. 1020-1085**

## **THE PAPAL EMPIRE**

We associate with Hildebrand the great contest of the Middle Ages between spiritual and temporal authority, the triumph of the former, and its supremacy in Europe until the Reformation. What great ideas and events are interwoven with that majestic domination,—not in one age, but for fifteen centuries; not religious merely, but political, embracing as it were the whole progress of European society, from the fall of the Roman Empire to the Protestant Reformation; yea, intimately connected with the condition of Europe to the present day, and not of Europe only, but America itself! What an august power is this Catholic empire, equally great as an institution and as a religion! What lessons of human experience, what great truths of government, what subtile influences, reaching alike the palaces of kings and the hovels of peasants, are indissolubly linked with its marvellous domination, so that whether in its growth or decay it is more suggestive than the rise and fall of any temporal empire. It has

produced, probably, more illustrious men than any political State in Europe. It has aimed to accomplish far grander ends. It is invested with more poetic interest. Its policy, its heroes, its saints, its doctors, its dignitaries, its missions, its persecutions, all rise up before us with varied but never-ending interest, when seriously contemplated. It has proved to be the most wonderful fabric of what we call worldly wisdom that our world has seen,—controlling kings, dictating laws to ancient monarchies, and binding the souls of millions with a more perfect despotism than Oriental emperors ever sought or dreamed. And what a marvellous vitality it seems to have! It has survived the attacks of its countless enemies; it has recovered from the shock of the Reformation; it still remains majestic and powerful, extending its arms of paternal love or Briarean terror over half of Christendom. As a temporal government, rivalling kings in the pomps of war and the pride of armies, it may be passing away; but as an organization to diffuse and conserve religious truths,—yea, even to bring a moral pressure on the minds of princes and governors, and reinforce its ranks with the mighty and the noble,—it seems to be as potent as ever. It is still sending its missionaries, its prelates, and its cardinals into the heart of Protestant countries, who anticipate and boast of new victories. It derides the dissensions and the rationalistic speculations of the Protestants, and predicts that they will either become open Pagans or re-enter the fold of Saint Peter. No longer do angry partisans call it the "Beast" or the "Scarlet Mother" or the "predicted Antichrist," since its religious

creeds in their vital points are more in harmony with the theology of venerated Fathers than those of some of the progressive and proudest parties which call themselves Protestant. In Germany, in France,—shall I add, in England and America?—it is more in earnest, and more laborious and self-denying than many sects among the Protestants. In Germany—in those very seats of learning and power and fashion which once were kindled into lofty enthusiasm by the voice of Luther—who is it that desert the churches and disregard the sacraments, the Catholics or the Protestants?

Surely such a power, whether we view it as an institution or as a religion, cannot be despised, even by the narrowest and most fanatical Protestant. It is too grand and venerable for sarcasm, ridicule, or mockery. It is too potent and respectable to be sneered at or lied about. No cause can be advanced permanently except by adherence to the truth, whether it be agreeable or not. If the Papacy were a mere despotism, having nothing else in view than the inthralment of mankind,—of which it has been accused,—then mankind long ago, in lofty indignation, would have hurled it from its venerable throne. But despotic as its yoke is in the eyes of Protestants, and always has been and always may be, it is something more than that, having at heart the welfare of the very millions whom it rules by working on their fears. In spite of dogmas which are deductions from questionable premises, or which are at war with reason, and ritualism borrowed from other religions, and "pious frauds," and Jesuitical means to

compass desirable ends,—which Protestants indignantly discard, and which they maintain are antagonistic to the spirit of primitive Christianity,—still it is also the defender and advocate of vital Christian truths, to which we trace the hopes and consolations of mankind. As the conservator of doctrines common to all Christian sects it cannot be swept away by the hand of man; nor as a government, confining its officers and rules to the spiritual necessities of its members. Its empire is spiritual rather than temporal. Temporal monarchs are hurled from their thrones. The long line of the Bourbons vanishes before the tempests of revolution, and they who were borne into power by these tempests are in turn hurled into ignominious banishment; but the Pope—he still sits secure on the throne of the Gregories and the Clements, ready to pronounce benedictions or hurl anathemas, to which half of Europe bows in fear or love.

Whence this strange vitality? What are the elements of a power so enduring and so irresistible? What has given to it its greatness and its dignity? I confess I gaze upon it as a peasant surveys a king, as a boy contemplates a queen of beauty,—as something which may be talked about, yet removed beyond our influence, and no more affected by our praise or censure than is a procession of cardinals by the gaze of admiring spectators in Saint Peter's Church. Who can measure it, or analyze it, or comprehend it? The weapons of reason appear to fall impotent before its haughty dogmatism. Genius cannot reconcile its inconsistencies. Serenely it sits, unmoved amid

all the aggressions of human thought and all the triumphs of modern science. It is both lofty and degraded; simple, yet worldly wise; humble, yet scornful and proud; washing beggars' feet, yet imposing commands on the potentates of earth; benignant, yet severe on all who rebel; here clothed in rags, and there revelling in palaces; supported by charities, yet feasting the princes of the earth; assuming the title of "servant of the servants of God," yet arrogating the highest seat among worldly dignitaries. Was there ever such a contradiction?—"glory in debasement, and debasement in glory,"—type of the misery and greatness of man? Was there ever such a mystery, so occult are its arts, so subtile its policy, so plausible its pretensions, so certain its shafts? How imposing the words of paternal benediction! How grand the liturgy brought down from ages of faith! How absorbed with beatific devotion appears to be the worshipper at its consecrated altars! How ravishing the music and the chants of grand ceremonials! How typical the churches and consecrated monuments of the passion of Christ! Everywhere you see the great emblem of our redemption,—on the loftiest pinnacle of the Mediaeval cathedral, on the dresses of the priests, over the gorgeous altars, in the ceremony of the Mass, in the baptismal rite, in the paintings of the side chapels; everywhere are rites and emblems betokening maceration, grief, sacrifice, penitence, the humiliation of humanity before the awful power of divine Omnipotence, whose personality and moral government no Catholic dares openly to deny.

And yet, of what crimes and abominations has not this government been, accused? If we go back to darker ages, and accept what history records, what wars has not this Church encouraged, what discords has she not incited, what superstitions has she not indorsed, what pride has she not arrogated, what cruelties has she not inflicted, what countries has she not robbed, what hardships has she not imposed, what deceptions has she not used, what avenues of thought has she not guarded with a flaming sword, what truth has she not perverted, what goodness has she not mocked and persecuted? Ah, interrogate the Albigenses, the Waldenses, the shades of Jerome of Prague, of Huss, of Savonarola, of Cranmer, of Coligny, of Galileo; interrogate the martyrs of the Thirty Years' War, and those who were slain by the dragonnades of Louis XIV., those who fell by the hand of Alva and Charles IX.; go to Smithfield, and Paris on Saint Bartholomew; think of gunpowder plots and inquisitions, and Jesuit intrigues and Dominican tortures, of which history accuses the Papal Church,—barbarities worse than those of savages, inflicted at the command of the ministers of a gospel of love!

I am compelled to allude to these things; I do not dwell on them, since they were the result of the intolerance of human nature as much as the bigotry of the Church,—faults of an age, more than of a religion; although, whether exaggerated or not, more disgraceful than the persecutions of Christians by Roman emperors.

As for the supreme rulers of this contradictory Church, so

benevolent and yet so cruel, so enlightened and yet so fanatical, so humble and yet so proud,—this institution of blended piety and fraud, equally renowned for saints, theologians, statesmen, drivellers, and fanatics; the joy and the reproach, the glory and the shame of earth,—there never were greater geniuses or greater fools: saints of almost preternatural sanctity, like the first Leo and Gregory, or hounds like Boniface VIII. or Alexander VI.; an array of scholars and dunces, ascetics and gluttons, men who adorned and men who scandalized their lofty position; and yet, on the whole, we are forced to admit, the most remarkable body of rulers any empire has known, since they were elevated by their peers, and generally for talents or services, at a period of life when character is formed and experience is matured. They were not greater than their Church or their age, like the Charlemagnes and Peters of secular history, but they were the picked men, the best representatives of their Church; ambitious, doubtless, and worldly, as great potentates generally are, but made so by the circumstances which controlled them. Who can wield irresponsible power and not become arrogant, and perhaps self-indulgent? It requires the almost superhuman virtue of a Marcus Aurelius or a Saint Louis to crucify the pride of rank and power. If the president of a college or of a railroad or of a bank becomes a different man to the eye of an early friend, what can be expected of those who are raised above public opinion, and have no fetters on their wills,—men who are regarded as infallible and feel themselves supreme!

But of all these three hundred or four hundred men who have swayed the destinies of Europe,—an uninterrupted line of pontiffs for fifteen hundred years or more,—no one is so famous as Gregory VII. for the grandeur of his character, the heroism of his struggles, and the posthumous influence of his deeds. He was too great a man to be called by his papal title. He is best known by his baptismal name, Hildebrand, the greatest hero of the Roman Church. There are some men whose titles add nothing to their august names,—David, Julius, Constantine, Augustine. When a man has become very eminent we drop titles altogether, except in military life. We say Daniel Webster, Edward Everett, Jonathan Edwards, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, William Pitt. Hildebrand is a greater name than Gregory VII., and with him is identified the greatest struggle of the Papacy against the temporal powers. I do not aim to dissect his character so much as to present his services to the Church. I wish to show why and how he is identified with movements of supreme historical importance. It would be easy to make him out a saint and martyr, and equally so to paint him as a tyrant and usurper. It is of little consequence to us whether he was ascetic or ambitious or unscrupulous; but it *is* of consequence to show the majestic power of those ideas by which he ruled the Middle Ages, and which will never pass away as sublime agencies so long as men are ignorant and superstitious. As a man he no longer lives, but his thunderbolts are perpetual powers, since they still alarm the fears of men.

Still, his personal history is not uninteresting. Born of humble



parents in Italy in the year 1020, the son of a carpenter, he rose by genius and virtue to the highest offices and dignities. But his greatness was in force of character rather than original ideas,—like that of Washington, or William III., or the Duke of Wellington. He had not the comprehensive intellect of Charlemagne, nor the creative genius of Peter of Russia, but he had the sagacity of Richelieu and the iron will of Napoleon. He was statesman as well as priest,—marvellous for his activity, insight into human nature, vast executive abilities, and dauntless heroism. He comprehended the only way whereby Christendom could be governed, and unscrupulously used the means of success. He was not a great scholar, or theologian, or philosopher, but a man of action, embracing opportunities and striking decisive blows. From first to last he was devoted to his cause, which was greater than himself,—even the spiritual supremacy of the Papacy. I do not read of great intellectual precocity, like that of Cicero and William Pitt, nor of great attainments, like those of Abélard and Thomas Aquinas, nor even an insight, like that of Bacon, into what constitutes the dignity of man and the true glory of civilization; but, like Ambrose and the first Leo, he was early selected for important missions and responsible trusts, all of which he discharged with great fidelity and ability. His education was directed by the monks of Cluny,—that princely abbey in Burgundy where "monks were sovereigns and sovereigns were monks." Like all earnest monks, he was ascetic, devotional, and self-sacrificing. Like all men ambitious to rule, "he learned how

to obey." He pondered on the Holy Scriptures as well as on the canons of the Church. So marked a man was he that he was early chosen as prior of his convent; and so great were his personal magnetism, eloquence, and influence that "he induced Bruno, the Bishop of Toul, when elected pope by the Emperor of Germany, to lay aside the badges and vestments of the pontifical office, and refuse his title, until he should be elected by the clergy and people of Rome,"—thus showing that at the age of twenty-nine he comprehended the issues of the day, and meditated on the gigantic changes it was necessary to make before the pope could be the supreme ruler of Christendom.

The autocratic idea of Leo I., and the great Gregory who sent his missionaries to England, was that to which Hildebrand's ardent soul clung with preternatural earnestness, as the only government fit for turbulent and superstitious ages. He did not originate this idea, but he defended and enforced it as had never been done before, so that to many minds he was the great architect of the papal structure. It was a rare spectacle to see a sovereign pontiff lay aside the insignia of his grandeur at the bidding of this monk of Cluny; it was grander to see this monk laying the foundation of an irresistible despotism, which was to last beyond the time of Luther. Not merely was Leo IX. his tool, but three successive popes were chosen at his dictation. And when he became cardinal and archdeacon he seems to have been the inspiring genius of the papal government, undertaking the most important missions, curbing the turbulent spirit of the

Roman princes, and assisting in all ecclesiastical councils. It was by his suggestion that abbots were deposed, and bishops punished, and monarchs reprimanded. He was the prime minister of four popes before he accepted that high office to which he doubtless had aspired while meditating as a monk amid the sunny slopes of Cluny, since he knew that the exigences of the Church required a bold and able ruler,—and who in Christendom was bolder and more far-reaching than he? He might have been elevated to the chair of Saint Peter at an earlier period, but he was contented with power rather than glory, knowing that his day would come, and at a time when his extraordinary abilities would be most needed. He could afford to wait; and no man is truly great who cannot bide his time.

At last Hildebrand received the reward of his great services,—“a reward,” says Stephen, “which he had long contemplated, but which, with self-controlling policy, he had so long declined.” In the year 1073 Hildebrand became Gregory VII., and his memorable pontificate began as a reformer of the abuses of his age, and the intrepid defender of that unlimited and absolute despotism which inthrallled not merely the princes of Europe, but the mind of Christendom itself. It was he who not only proclaimed the liberties of the people against nobles, and made the Church an asylum for misery and oppression, but who realized the idea that the Church was the mother of spiritual principles, and that the spiritual authority should be raised over all temporal power.

In the great crises of States and Empires deliverers seem to be raised up by Divine Providence to restore peace and order, and maintain the first condition of society, or extricate nations from overwhelming calamities. Thus Charlemagne appeared at the right time to prevent the overthrow of Europe by new waves of barbaric invasion. Thus William the Silent preserved the nationality of Holland, and Gustavus Adolphus gave religious liberty to Germany when persecution was apparently successful. Thus Richelieu undermined feudalism in France, and established absolutism as one of the needed forces of his turbulent age, even as Napoleon gave law and order to France when distracted by the anarchism of a revolution which did not comprehend the liberty which was invoked. So Hildebrand was raised up to establish the only government which could rescue Europe from the rapacities of feudal nobles, and establish law and order in the hands of the most enlightened class; so that, like Peter the Great, he looms up as a reformer as well as a despot. He appears in a double light.

Now you ask: "What were his reforms, and what were his schemes of aggrandizement, for which we honor him while we denounce him?" We cannot see the reforms he attempted without glancing at the enormous evils which stared him in the face.

Society in Europe, in the eleventh century, was nearly as dark and degraded as it was on the fall of the Merovingian dynasty. In some respects it had reached the lowest depth of wretchedness which the Middle Ages ever saw. Never had the clergy been more ignorant, more sensual, and more worldly.

They had not the piety of the fourth century, nor the intelligence of the sixteenth century; they were powerful and wealthy, but exceedingly corrupt. Monastic institutions covered the face of Europe, but the monks had sadly departed from the virtues which partially redeemed the miseries that succeeded the fall of the Roman Empire. The lives of the clergy, regular and secular, still compared favorably with the lives of the feudal nobility, who had, in addition to priestly vices, the vices of robbers and bandits. But still the clergy were notoriously ignorant, superstitious, and sensual. Monasteries sought to be independent of all foreign control and of episcopal jurisdiction. They had been enormously enriched by princes and barons, and they owned, with the other clergy, half the lands of Europe, and more than half its silver and gold. The monks fattened on all the luxuries which then were known; they neglected the rules of their order and lived in idleness,—spending their time in the chase, or in taverns and brothels. Hardly a great scholar or theologian had arisen among them since the Patristic age, with the exception of a few schoolmen like Anselm and Peter Lombard. Saint Bernard had not yet appeared to reform the Benedictines, nor Dominic and Saint Francis to found new orders. Gluttony and idleness were perhaps the characteristic vices of the great body of the monks, who numbered over one hundred thousand. Hunting and hawking were the most innocent of their amusements. They have been accused of drinking toasts in honor of the Devil, and celebrating Mass in a state of intoxication. "Not one in a

thousand," says Hallam, "could address to one another a common letter of salutation." They were a walking libel on everything sacred. Read the account of their banquets in the annals which have come down to us of the tenth and eleventh centuries, when convents were so numerous and rich. If Dugdale is to be credited, their gluttony exceeded that of any previous or succeeding age. Their cupidity, their drunken revels, their infamous haunts, their disgusting coarseness, their hypocrisy, ignorance, selfishness, and superstition were notorious. Yet the monks were not worse than the secular clergy, high and low. Bishoprics and all benefices were bought and sold; "canons were trodden under foot; ancient traditions were turned out of doors; old customs were laid aside;" boys were made archbishops; ludicrous stories were recited in the churches; the most disgraceful crimes were pardoned for money. Desolation, according to Cardinal Baronius, was seen in the temples of the Lord. As Petrarch said of Avignon in a better age, "There is no pity, no charity, no faith, no fear of God. The air, the streets, the houses, the markets, the beds, the hotels, the churches, even the altars consecrated to God, are all peopled with knaves and liars;" or, to use the still stronger language of a great reviewer, "The gates of hell appeared to roll back on their infernal hinges, that there might go forth malignant spirits to empty the vials of wrath on the patrimony even of the great chief of the apostles."

These vices, it is true, were not confined to the clergy. All classes were alike forlorn, miserable, and corrupt. It was a

gloomy period. The Church, whenever religious, was sad and despairing. The contemplative hid themselves in noisome and sepulchral crypts. The inspiring chants of Ambrose gave place to gloomy and monotonous antiphonal singing,—that is, when the monks confined themselves to their dismal vocation. What was especially needed was a reform among the clergy themselves. They indeed owned their allegiance to the Pope, as the supreme head of the Church, but their fealty was becoming a mockery. They could not support the throne of absolutism if they were not respected by the laity. Baronial and feudal power was rapidly gaining over spiritual, and this was a poor exchange for the power of the clergy, if it led to violence and rapine. It is to maintain law and order, justice and safety, that all governments are established.

Hildebrand saw and lamented the countless evils of the day, especially those which were loosening the bands of clerical obedience, and undermining the absolutism which had become the great necessity of his age. He made up his mind to reform these evils. No pope before him had seriously undertaken this gigantic task. The popes who for two hundred years had preceded him were a scandal and a reproach to their exalted position. These heirs of Saint Peter wasted their patrimony in pleasures and pomps. At no period of the papal history was the papal chair filled with such bad or incompetent men. Of these popes two were murdered, five were driven into exile, and four were deposed. Some were raised to prominence by arms, and others

by money. John X. commanded an army in person; John XI. died in a fit of debauchery; and John XII. was murdered by one of the infamous women whom he patronized. Benedict IX. was driven from the throne by robbery and murder, while Gregory VI. purchased the papal dignity. For two hundred years no commanding character had worn the tiara.

Hildebrand, however, set a new example, and became a watchful shepherd of his fold. His private life was without reproach; he was absorbed in his duties; he sympathized with learning and learned men. He was the friend of Lanfranc, and it was by his influence that this great prelate was appointed to the See of Canterbury, and a closer union was formed with England. He infused by his example a quiet but noble courage into the soul of Anselm. He had great faults, of course,—faults of his own and faults of his age. I wonder why so *strong* a man has escaped the admiring eulogium of Carlyle. Guizot compares him with the Russian Peter. In some respects he reminds me of Oliver Cromwell; since both equally deplored the evils of the day, and both invoked the aid of God Almighty. Both were ambitious, and unscrupulous in the use of tools. Neither of them was stained by vulgar vices, nor seduced from his course by love of ease or pleasure. Both are to be contemplated in the double light of reformer and usurper. Both were honest, and both were unscrupulous; honest in seeking to promote public morality and the welfare of society, and unscrupulous in the arts by which their power was gained.



That which filled the soul of Hildebrand with especial grief was the alienation of the clergy from their highest duties, their worldly lives, and their frail support in his efforts to elevate the spiritual power. Therefore he determined to make a reform of the clergy themselves, having in view all the time their assistance in establishing the papal supremacy. He attacked the clergy where they were weakest. They—the secular ones, the parish priests—were getting married, especially in Germany and France. They were setting at defiance the laws of celibacy; they not only sought wives, but they lived in concubinage.

Now celibacy had been regarded as the supernal virtue from the time of Saint Jerome. It was supposed to be a state most favorable to Christian perfection; it animated the existence of the most noted saints. Says Jerome, "Take axe in hand and hew down the sterile tree of marriage." This notion of the superior virtue of virginity was one of the fruits of those Eastern theogonies which were engrafted on the early Church, growing out of the Oriental idea of the inalienable evil of matter. It was one of the fundamental principles of monasticism; and monasticism, wherever born—whether in India or the Syrian deserts—was one of the established institutions of the Church. It was indorsed by Benedict as well as by Basil; it had taken possession of the minds of the Gothic nations more firmly even than of the Eastern. The East never saw such monasteries as those which covered Italy, France, Germany, and England; they were more needed among the feudal robbers of Europe than in the effeminate monarchies

of Asia. Moreover it was in monasteries that the popes had ever found their strongest adherents, their most zealous supporters. Without the aid of convents the papal empire might have crumbled. Monasticism and the papacy were strongly allied; one supported the other. So efficient were monastic institutions in advocating the idea of a theocracy, as upheld by the popes, that they were exempted from episcopal authority. An abbot was as powerful and independent as a bishop. But to make the Papacy supreme it was necessary to call in the aid of the secular priests likewise. Unmarried priests, being more like monks, were more efficient supporters of the papal throne. To maintain celibacy, therefore, was always in accordance with papal policy.

But Nature had gradually asserted its claims over tradition and authority. The clergy, especially in France and Germany, were setting at defiance the edicts of popes and councils. The glory of celibacy was in an eclipse.

No one comprehended the necessity of celibacy, among the clergy, more clearly than Hildebrand,—himself a monk by education and sympathy. He looked upon married life, with all its hallowed beauty, as a profanation for a priest. In his eyes the clergy were married only to the Church. "Domestic affections suited ill with the duties of a theocratic ministry." Anything which diverted the labors of the clergy from the Church seemed to him an outrage and a degeneracy. How could they reach the state of beatific existence if they were to listen to the prattle of children, or be engrossed with the joys of conjugal or parental

love? So he assembled a council, and caused it to pass canons to the effect that married priests should not perform any clerical office; that the people should not even be present at Mass celebrated by them; that all who had wives—or concubines, as he called them—should put them away; and that no one should be ordained who did not promise to remain unmarried during his whole life.

Of course there was a violent opposition. A great outcry was raised, especially in Germany. The whole body of the secular priests exclaimed against the proceeding. At Mentz they threatened the life of the archbishop, who attempted to enforce the decree. At Paris a numerous synod was assembled, in which it was voted that Gregory ought not here to be obeyed. But Gregory was stronger than his rebellious clergy,—stronger than the instincts of human nature, stronger than the united voice of reason and Scripture. He fell back on the majestic power of prevailing ideas, on the ascetic element of the early Church, on the traditions of monastic life. He was supported by more than a hundred thousand monks, by the superstitions of primitive ages, by the example of saints and martyrs, by his own elevated rank, by the allegiance due to him as head of the Church. Excommunications were hurled, like thunderbolts, into remotest hamlets, and the murmurs of indignant Christendom were silenced by the awful denunciations of God's supposed vicegerent. The clergy succumbed before such a terrible spiritual force, The fear of hell—the great idea by which the priests

themselves controlled their flocks—was more potent than any temporal good. What priest in that age would dare resist his spiritual monarch on almost any point, and especially when disobedience was supposed to entail the burnings of a physical hell forever and ever? So celibacy was re-established as a law of the Christian Church at the bidding of that far-seeing genius who had devised the means of spiritual despotism. That law—so gloomy, so unnatural, so fraught with evil—has never been repealed; it still rules the Catholic priesthood of Europe and America. Nor will it be repealed so long as the ideas of the Middle Ages have more force than enlightened reason. It is an abominable law, but who can doubt its efficacy in cementing the power of the popes?

But simony, or the sale of ecclesiastical benefices, was a still more alarming evil to the mind of Gregory. It was the great scandal of the Church and age. Here we honor the Pope for striving to remove it. And yet its abolition was no easy thing. He came in contact with the selfishness of barons and kings. He found it an easier matter to take away the wives of priests than the purses of princes. Priests who had vowed obedience might consent to the repudiation of their wives, but would great temporal robbers part with their spoils? The sale of benefices was one great source of royal and baronial revenues. Bishoprics, once conferred for wisdom and piety, had become prizes for the rapacious and ambitious. Bishops and abbots were most frequently chosen from the ranks of the great. Powerful

Sees were the gifts of kings to their favorites or families, or were bought by the wealthy; so that worldly or incapable men were made overseers of the Church of Christ. The clergy were in danger of being hopelessly secularized. And the evil spread to the extremities of the clerical body. The princes and barons were getting control of the Church itself. Bishops often possessed a plurality of Sees. Children were elevated to episcopal thrones. Sycophants, courtiers, jesters, imbecile sons of princes, became great ecclesiastical dignitaries. Who can wonder at the degeneracy of the clergy when they held their cures at the hands of lay patrons, to whom they swore allegiance for the temporalities of their benefices? Even the ring and the crozier, the emblems of spiritual authority,—once received at the hand of metropolitan archbishops alone, were now bestowed by temporal sovereigns, who claimed thereby fealty and allegiance; so that princes had gradually usurped the old rights of the Church, and Gregory resolved to recover them. So long as emperors and kings could fill the rich bishoprics and abbacies with their creatures, the papal dominion was weakened in its most vital point, and might become a dream. This evil was rapidly undermining the whole ecclesiastical edifice, and it required a hero of prodigious genius, energy, and influence to reform it.

Hildebrand saw and comprehended the whole extent and bearing of the evil, and resolved to remove it or die in the attempt. It was not only undermining his throne, but was secularizing the Church and destroying the real power of the clergy. He made

up his mind to face the difficulty in its most dreaded quarters. He knew that the attempt to remove this scandal would entail a desperate conflict with the princes of the earth. Before this, popes and princes were generally leagued together; they played into each other's hands: but now a battle was to be fought between the temporal and spiritual powers. He knew that princes would never relinquish so lucrative a source of profit as the sale of powerful Sees, unless the right to sell them were taken away by some tremendous conflict. He therefore prepared for the fight, and forged his weapons and gathered together his forces. Nor would he waste time by idle negotiations; it was necessary to act with promptness and vigor. No matter how great the danger; no matter how powerful his enemies. The Church was in peril; and he resolved to come to the rescue, cost what it might. What was his life compared with the sale of God's heritage? For what was he placed in the most exalted post of the Church, if not to defend her in an alarming crisis?'

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