THE MIDDLE PERIOD OF EUROPEAN HISTORY

FROM THE BREAK-UP OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE TO THE OPENING OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

BY

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PREFACE

In order to enable teachers to adjust their historical instruction with greater freedom than would otherwise be possible, it seems wise to issue as a separate volume that portion of *Medieval and Modern Times* which deals with the period extending from the dissolution of the Roman Empire to the opening of the eighteenth century. This division does not correspond to that usually called the Middle Ages but is extended to comprise the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There are, however, a number of cogent reasons for viewing these two centuries as more medieval than modern. To cite a single striking example, it was not until after the year 1700 that the intelligent people of Europe finally gave up their belief in witchcraft, which seems to us now a delusion appropriate only to savages. Those social conditions and modes of thought produced by scientific discoveries and inventions, by democracy and world commerce which are characteristic of our day only begin to emerge on a large scale in the eighteenth century. It was at the opening of the eighteenth century that the Prussian army entered upon those preparations which are proving so disastrous for the world to-day. So it will be quite proper to include the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the "Middle Period" and regard them as belonging rather to an introduction to our own times than as forming a definite part of the period in which we live.

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CHAPTER I

WESTERN EUROPE BEFORE THE BARBARIAN INVASIONS

PRELUDE

Object of this volume

1. History, in the broadest sense of the word, is all that we know about everything that man has ever done, or thought, or hoped, or felt. It is the study of past human affairs. The present volume deals with only a small, but for us most important, part of the history of the world. Its object is to give a very brief, clear account of the great changes which have taken place in western Europe since the German barbarians, some fifteen hundred years ago, overcame the armies of the Roman Empire and set up kingdoms of their own, out of which the present countries of France, Germany, Italy, Austria, Spain, and England have grown.

History no longer "a record of past events"

History used to be defined as "the record of past *events*." And most of the older textbooks tell about scarcely anything except events — how battles were fought, how kings came to the throne one after another, how treaties were concluded and the boundary lines between states were changed from time to time. But nowadays we are beginning to see that the history of past *conditions* and *institutions* is far more important than that of mere events. We want to know how people lived, what kind of buildings they built, what kind of books they read, how much they knew and what they thought about science and religion; how they were governed, what they manufactured and how they carried on their business.

Illustrations of what is meant by past conditions and institutions

It is important to understand clearly what is meant by events, conditions, and institutions, since history deals with all three. An event is an occurrence, such as the death of Queen Victoria or the battle of Gettysburg. A condition is a more or less permanent state of affairs, such as the scarcity of money in the early Middle Ages or the fact that a hundred years ago only a small part of the English people could read. By institution we usually mean such things as the English Parliament, public schools, or trial by jury. Both conditions and institutions often endure for hundreds of years. Events happen in a short time but often produce great results, as did the invention of printing and the discovery of America.

Value of the newer kind of history

The newer kind of history, which deals with past conditions as well as events, enables us really to understand the past and to compare it with the present, and in that way we come to understand the conditions in which we live much better than we should otherwise do. We see where our ideas and beliefs and inventions came from, how slowly most of them developed, and how men have changed their ways of living as they learned more.

Impossibility of dividing the past into clearly defined periods

It is impossible to divide the past into distinct, clearly defined periods and prove that one age ended and another began in a particular year, such as 476, or 1453, or 1789. Men do not and cannot change their habits and ways of doing things all at once, no matter what happens. It is true that a single event, such as an important battle which results in the loss of a nation's independence, may produce an abrupt change in the government. This in turn may either encourage or discourage trade and manufactures, and modify the language and alter the interests of a people. But these deeper changes take place only very gradually. After a battle or a revolution the farmer will sow and reap in his old way; the artisan will take up his familiar tasks, and the merchant his buying and selling. The scholar will study and write as he formerly did, and the household will go on under the new government just as it did under the old.

All general changes take place gradually

So a change in government affects the habits of a people but slowly in any case, and it may leave them quite unaltered.

The unity or continuity of history

This tendency of mankind to do, in general, this year what it did last, in spite of changes in some one department of life, — such as substituting a president for a king, traveling by rail instead of on horseback, or getting the news from a newspaper instead of from a neighbor, — results in what is called the *unity* or *continuity of history*. The truth that no sudden change has ever taken place in all the customs of a people, and that it cannot, in the nature of things, take place, is perhaps the most fundamental lesson that history teaches.

General changes do not occur on fixed dates

Historians sometimes seem to forget this principle, when they undertake to begin and end their books at precise dates. We find histories of Europe from 476 to 918, from 1270 to 1492, as if the accession of a capable German king in 918, or the death of a famous French king in 1270, or the discovery of America in 1492, marked a *general* change in European affairs. In reality, however, no general change took place at these dates or in any other single year. It would doubtless have proved a great convenience to the readers and writers of history if the world had agreed to carry out a definite program and alter its habits at precise dates, preferably at the opening of each century. But no such agreement has ever been adopted, and the historical student must take things as he finds them. He must recognize that nations retain their old customs while they adopt new ones, and that a small portion of a nation may advance while the greater part of it stays behind.

Meaning of the term "Middle Ages"

We cannot, therefore, hope to fix any year or event which may properly be taken as the beginning of that long period which followed the break-up of the Roman Empire in western Europe and which is commonly called the Middle Ages. Beyond the northern and eastern boundaries of the Roman Empire, which embraced the whole civilized world from the Euphrates to Britain, mysterious peoples moved about whose history before they came into occasional contact with the Romans is practically unknown.

These Germans, or "barbarians," as the Romans called them, were destined to put an end to the Roman Empire in western Europe. They had first begun to make trouble about a hundred years before Christ, when a great army of them was defeated by the Roman general Marius. Julius Cæsar narrates in polished Latin, familiar to all who begin the study of that language, how fifty years later he drove back other bands. Five hundred years elapsed, however, before German chieftains succeeded in founding kingdoms within the boundaries of the Empire. With their establishment the Roman government in western Europe may be said to have come to an end and the Middle Ages to have begun.

Most medieval notions to be found in the late Roman Empire

Yet it would be a great mistake to suppose that this means that the Roman civilization suddenly disappeared at this time. Long before the German conquest, art and literature had begun to decline toward the level that they reached in the Middle Ages. Many of the ideas and conditions which prevailed after the coming of the barbarians were common enough before. Even the ignorance and strange ideas which we associate particularly with the Middle Ages are to be found in the later Roman Empire.

The term "Middle Ages" will be used in this volume to mean, roughly speaking, the period of over a thousand years that elapsed between the fifth century, when the disorder of the barbarian invasions was becoming general, and the opening of the sixteenth century, when Europe was well on its way to recover all that had been lost since the break-up of the Roman Empire.

The Roman Empire and its Government

2. Before we begin our study of the history of western Europe since the break-up of the Roman Empire we must stop to consider briefly the way in which people were living before the German leaders succeeded in establishing their kingdoms.

Extent of the Roman Empire

At the opening of the fifth century there were no separate, independent states in western Europe such as we find on the map to-day. The whole area now occupied by England, France, Spain,

and Italy formed at that time only a part of the vast realms ruled over by the Roman emperor and his host of officials. As for Germany, most of it was still familiar only to the half-savage tribes who inhabited it. The Romans had tried in vain to conquer this part of Europe, but finally had to content themselves with keeping the German hordes out of the Empire by means of fortifications and guards along the Rhine and Danube rivers.

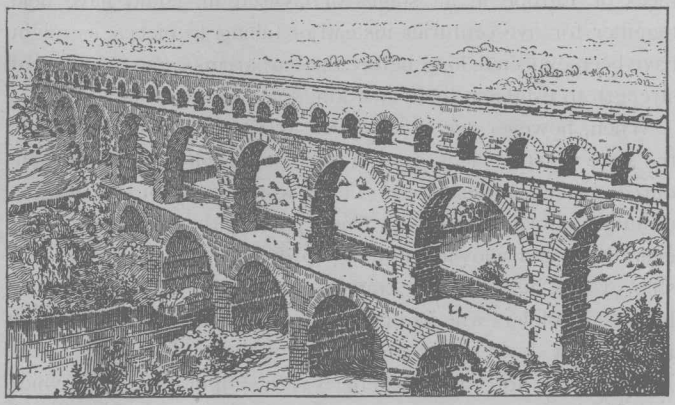

FIG. 1. ROMAN AQUEDUCT NEAR NÎMES

This structure was built by the Romans about the year 20 A.D. to supply the Roman colony of Nemausus (now called Nîmes) in southern France with water from two excellent springs twenty-five miles distant. It is nearly 900 feet long and 160 feet high, and carried the water over the valley of the river Gard. The channel for the water is at the very top, and one can still walk through it. The miles of aqueduct on either side of this bridge have almost disappeared

Great diversity of races included within the Empire

The Roman Empire, which embraced southern and western Europe, western Asia, and even the northern portion of Africa (see map), included the most diverse peoples and races. Egyptians, Arabs, Jews, Greeks, Italians, Gauls, Britons, Iberians,—all alike were under the sovereign rule of Rome. One great state embraced the nomad shepherds who spread their tents on the borders of Sahara, the mountaineers in the fastnesses of

Wales, and the citizens of Athens, Alexandria, and Rome, heirs to all the luxury and learning of the ages. Whether one lived in York or Jerusalem, Memphis or Vienna, he paid his taxes into the same treasury, he was tried by the same law, and looked to the same armies for protection.

Bonds which held the Empire together

At first it seems incredible that this huge Empire, which included African and Asiatic peoples as well as the most various races of Europe in all stages of civilization, could have held together for five centuries instead of falling to pieces, as might have been expected, long before the barbarians came in sufficient strength to establish their own kingdoms in its midst.

When, however, we consider the bonds of union which held the state together, it is easy to understand why the Empire endured so long. These were (1) the wonderfully organized government with its officials in every part of the realm, watching everything and allowing nothing to escape them; (2) the worship of the head of the Empire, the emperor; (3) the hardy legions of soldiers who had made Rome's conquests and could be used to put down revolt and keep out the barbarians; (4) the Roman law in force everywhere; (5) the admirable roads, which enabled the soldiers to march quickly from place to place; and, lastly, (6) the Roman colonies and the teachers sent out by the government, for through them the same ideas and ways of doing things were carried to even the most distant parts of the Empire.

The Roman government attempted to regulate everything

Let us first glance at the government and the emperor. His decrees were dispatched throughout the length and breadth of the Roman dominions; whatsoever pleased him became law, according to the well-known principle of the Roman constitution. While the cities were permitted some freedom in the management of their own affairs, the emperor and his innumerable officials kept an eye upon even the humblest citizen. The Roman government, besides keeping order, settling law cases, and defending the boundaries, assumed many other responsibilities. It watched the grain dealers, butchers, and bakers, and saw to it that they properly supplied the public and never deserted their

occupation. In some cases it forced the son to follow the profession of his father. If it could have had its way, it would have had every one belong to a definite class of society, and his children after him. It kept the unruly poorer classes in the towns quiet by furnishing them with bread, and sometimes with wine, meat, and clothes. It provided amusement for them by expensive entertainments, such as races and gladiatorial combats (see Fig. 3). In a word, the Roman government was not only wonderfully organized, so that its power was felt throughout its whole extent, but it attempted to regulate almost every interest in life.

The worship of the emperor

Every one was required to join in the worship of the emperor because he stood for the majesty and glory of the Roman dominion. The inhabitants of each province might revere their particular gods, undisturbed by the government, but all were obliged, as good citizens, to join in the official sacrifices to the head of the State, as if he were a god. The early Christians were persecuted, not only because their religion was different from that of their fellows, but because they refused to reverence the images of the emperor, and openly prophesied the downfall of the Roman State. Their religion seemed incompatible with good citizenship, since it forbade them to show the usual respect for the government.

The Roman law

As there was one government, so there was one law for all the civilized world. The same principles of reason, justice, and humanity were believed to hold whether the Roman citizen lived upon the Euphrates or the Thames. The law of the Roman Empire is its chief legacy to posterity. Its provisions are still in force in many of the states of Europe to-day, and it is one of the subjects of study in our American universities. Wives and children were protected from the cruelty of the head of the house, who, in earlier centuries, had been privileged to treat the members of his family as slaves. The law held that it was better that a guilty person should escape than that an innocent person should be condemned. It conceived mankind, not as a group of nations and tribes, each with its own laws, but as one

people included in one great empire and subject to a single system of law based upon fairness and reason.

Roads

Magnificent roads were constructed, which enabled the messengers of the government and its armies to reach every part of the Empire with what at that time seemed incredible speed.

FIG. 2. ROMAN BRIDGE AT ST. CHAMAS

This Roman bridge with its handsome portals, at St. Chamas in southern France, was built in the time of the Emperor Augustus; that is, about the beginning of the Christian era

These highways made trade comparatively easy and encouraged merchants and travelers to visit the most distant portions of the realm. Everywhere they found the same coins and the same system of weights and measures.

Colonies, public buildings

Colonies were sent out to the confines of the Empire, and the remains of great public buildings, of theaters and bridges, of sumptuous villas and baths at places like Treves, Cologne, Bath, and Salzburg, indicate how thoroughly the influence and civilization of Rome penetrated to the utmost parts of the territory subject to her rule. The illustrations in this chapter will show what wonderfully fine towns the Roman colonies were.

The government encouraged education by supporting at least three teachers in every town of any considerable importance. They taught rhetoric and oratory and explained the works of the

great Latin and Greek writers, so that an educated man was pretty sure to find, even in the outlying parts of the great Empire, other educated men with much the same interests and ideas as his own. Everywhere men felt themselves to be not mere natives of this or that country but citizens of the Roman world.

The same culture throughout the Roman Empire

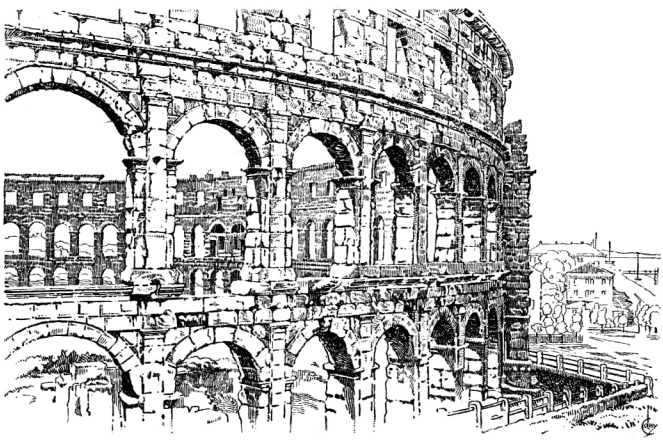

FIG. 3. ROMAN AMPHITHEATER AT POLA

Every large Roman town had a vast arena, or amphitheater, in which thousands of spectators could be seated to watch the public fights between professional swordsmen (gladiators) and between men and wild beasts. The emperors and rich men paid the expenses of these combats. The greatest of these arenas was the Coliseum at Rome. The one here represented shows that a Roman town of perhaps 40,000 inhabitants was supplied with an amphitheater, holding no less than 20,000 spectators, who must have assembled from all the region around. The seats have disappeared; only the outside walls remain

During the four centuries from the first emperor, Augustus, to the barbarian invasions we hear of no attempt on the part of its subjects to overthrow the Empire or to withdraw from it. The Roman State, it was universally believed, was to endure forever. Had a rebellious nation succeeded in throwing off the rule of the emperor and in establishing its independence, it would simply have placed itself outside the civilized world.

Loyalty to the Empire and conviction that it was eternal

The Weaknesses of the Roman Empire

Reasons why the Empire lost its power to defend itself against the Germans

3. Just why the Roman government, long so powerful and so universally respected, finally became unable longer to defend its borders, and gave way before the scattered attacks of the German peoples, who never combined in any general alliance against it, is a very difficult question to answer satisfactorily.

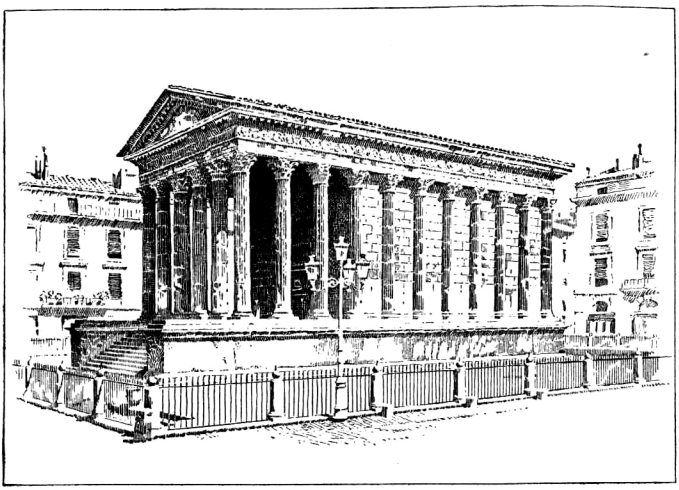

Fig. 4. Roman Temple at Nîmes

This beautiful temple at Nîmes, France, was probably built about the year one of the Christian era. It was situated in the forum with other public buildings which have now disappeared. After the break-up of the Roman Empire it was used as a Christian church, then as a town hall, then as a warehouse, and finally as a stable. In 1824 it was restored to its original condition as we now find it

We know very little about the times, because the accounts that have come down to us give us no reasons why things happened as they did, and the best we can do is to see what were the conditions in the Empire when the Germans invaded it.

The Roman government was in some respects very strong and well organized, but there was no satisfactory way of choosing

a new emperor. No candidate could secure the election unless he was supported by the army, and the soldiers in the various parts of the Empire often proposed different men for whom they were willing to fight. Civil war would then follow, which would come to a close only when one candidate succeeded in getting the better of all his rivals. This brought about frequent disorder, which did its part in weakening the Empire.

Civil wars over the elections of the emperors

It required a great deal of money to support the luxurious palaces of the emperors at Rome and Constantinople with their innumerable officials and servants, and to supply "bread and circuses" for the populace of the towns. All sorts of taxes and exactions were consequently devised by ingenious officials to make up the necessary revenue. The crushing burden of the great land tax, the emperor's chief source of income, was greatly increased by the bad way in which it was collected. The government made a group of the richer citizens in each of the towns permanently responsible for the whole amount due each year from all the landowners within their district. It was their business to collect the taxes and make up any deficiency, it mattered not from what cause.

Oppressive taxation

This responsibility, together with the weight of the taxes themselves, ruined so many landowners that the government was forced to decree that no one should desert his estates in order to escape the exactions. Only the very rich could stand the drain on their resources. The middle class sank into poverty and despair, and in this way the Empire lost just that prosperous class of citizens who should have been the leaders in business enterprises.

The sad plight of the poorer laboring classes was largely due to the terrible institution of slavery which prevailed everywhere in ancient times. When the Romans conquered a new region they were in the habit, in accordance with the customs of war, of reducing a considerable part of the inhabitants to slavery. In this way the number of slaves was constantly increased. There were millions of them. A single rich landholder might own hundreds and even thousands, and it was a poor man that

Slavery

did not have several at least. For six or seven centuries before the barbarian invasions every kind of labor fell largely into their hands in both country and town.

The villa

Land was the only highly esteemed form of wealth in the Roman Empire, in spite of the heavy taxes imposed upon it. Without large holdings of land no one could hope to enjoy a high social position or an honorable office under the government. Consequently the land came gradually into the hands of the rich and ambitious, and the small landed proprietor disappeared. Great estates called "villas" covered Italy, Gaul, and Britain.

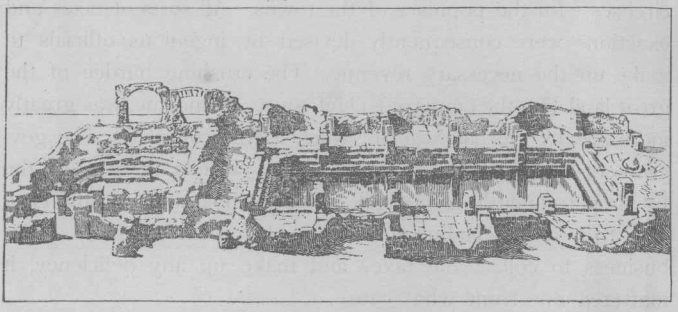

FIG. 5. ROMAN BATHS AT BATH

There are hot springs at Bath, England, and here the Roman colonists in Britain developed a fashionable watering place. In recent years the soil and rubbish which had through the centuries collected over the old Roman buildings has been removed and we can get some idea of how they were arranged. The picture represents a model of a part of the ruins. To the right is a great quadrangular pool, 83 by 40 feet in size, and to the left a circular bath. Over the whole, a fine hall was built, with recesses on either side of the big pool where one might sit and talk with his friends

These villas were cultivated and managed by armies of slaves, who not only tilled the land, but supplied their master, his household, and themselves with much that was needed on the plantation. The workmen among them made the tools, garments, and other manufactured articles necessary for the whole community, or "family," as it was called. Slaves cooked the food, waited on