

Chapter III

What was the “Fall” of the Roman Empire?

That state of society which I have just described, the ordered and united society of the Roman Empire, passed into another and very different state of society: the society of what are called “The Dark Ages.”

From these again rose, after another 600 years of adventures and perils, the great harvest of mediæval civilization. Hardly had the Roman Empire turned in its maturity to accept the fruit of its long development (I mean the Catholic Church), when it began to grow old and was clearly about to suffer some great transition. But that transition, which threatened to be death, proved in the issue not death at all, but a mixture of Vision and Change.

The close succession of fruit and decay in society is what one expects from the analogy of all living things: at the close of the cycle it is death that should come. A plant, just after it is most fruitful, falls quickly. So, one might imagine, should the long story of Mediterranean civilization have proceeded. When it was at its final and most complete stage, one would expect some final and complete religion which should satisfy its long search and solve its ancient riddles: but after such a discovery, after the fruit of such a maturity had fully developed, one would expect an end.

Now it has been the singular fortune of our European civilization that an end did not come. Dissolution was in some strange way checked. Death was averted. And the more closely one looks into the unique history of that salvation—the salvation of all that could be saved in a most ancient and fatigued society—the more one sees that this salvation was effected by no agency save that of the Catholic Church. Everything else, after, say, 250 A.D., the empty fashionable philosophies, the barbarians filling the army, the current passions and the current despair, made for nothing but ruin.

There is no parallel to this survival in all the history of mankind. Every other great civilization has, after many centuries of development, either fallen into a fixed and sterile sameness or died and disappeared. There is nothing left of Egypt, there is nothing left of Assyria. The Eastern civilizations remain,

but remain immovable; or if they change can only vulgarly copy external models.

But the civilization of Europe—the civilization, that is, of Rome and of the Empire—had a third fortune differing both from death and from sterility: it survived to a resurrection. Its essential seeds were preserved for a Second Spring.

For five or six hundred years men carved less well, wrote verse less well, let roads fall slowly into ruin, lost or rather coarsened the machinery of government, forgot or neglected much in letters and in the arts and in the sciences. But there was preserved, right through that long period, not only so much of letters and of the arts as would suffice to bridge the great gulf between the fifth century and the eleventh, but also so much of what was really vital in the mind of Europe as would permit that mind to blossom again after its repose. And the agency, I repeat, which effected this conservation of the seeds, was the Catholic Church.

It is impossible to understand this truth, indeed it is impossible to make any sense at all of European history, if we accept that story of the decline which is currently put forward in anti-Catholic academies, and which has seemed sufficient to anti-Catholic historians.

Their version is, briefly, this: The Roman Empire, becoming corrupt and more vicious through the spread of luxury and through a sort of native weakness to be discovered in the very blood of the Mediterranean, was at last invaded and overwhelmed by young and vigorous tribes of Germans. These brought with them all the strength of those native virtues which later rejected the unity of Christendom and began the modern Protestant societies—which are already nearly atheist and very soon will be wholly so.

A generic term has been invented by these modern and false historians whose version I am here giving; the vigorous, young, uncorrupt, and virtuous tribes which are imagined to have broken through the boundaries of the effete Empire and to have rejuvenated it, are grouped together as “Teutonic:” a German strain very strong numerically, superior also to what was left of Roman civilization in virile power, is said to have come in and to have taken over the handling of affairs. One great body of these Germans, the Franks, are said to have taken over Gaul; another (the Goths, in their various branches) Italy and Spain. But most complete, most fruitful, and most satisfactory of all (they tell us) was the eruption of these vigorous and healthy pagans into the outlying province of Britain, which they wholly conquered, exterminating its original inhabitants and colonizing it with their superior stock.

“It was inevitable” (the anti-Catholic historian proceeds to admit) “that the presence of uncultured though superior men should accelerate the decline of arts in the society which they thus conquered. It is further to be deplored that their simpler and native virtues were contaminated by the arts of the Roman clergy and that in some measure the official religion of Rome captured their noble souls; for that official religion permitted the poison of the Roman

decline to affect all the European mind—even the German mind—for many centuries. But at the same time this evil effect was counter-balanced by the ineradicable strength and virtues of the Northern barbaric blood. This sacred Teutonic blood it was which brought into Western Europe the subtlety of romantic conceptions, the true lyric touch in poetry, the deep reverence which was (till recently) the note of their religion, the love of adventure in which the old civilization was lacking, and a vast respect for women. At the same time their warrior spirit evolved the great structure of feudalism, the chivalric model and the whole military ideal of mediæval civilization.

"Is it to be wondered at that when great new areas of knowledge were opened up in the later fifteenth century by suddenly expanded travel, by the printing press, and by an unexpected advance in physical science, the emancipation of the European mind should have brought this pure and barbaric stock to its own again?

"In proportion as Teutonic blood was strong, in that proportion was the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and the hold upon men of Catholic tradition, shaken in the early sixteenth century; and before that century had closed the manly stirp of North Germany, Holland, Scandinavia and England, had developed the Protestant civilization a society advancing, healthy, and already the master of all rivals; destined soon to be, if it be not already, supreme."

Such is not an exaggerated summary of what the anti-Catholic school of history gave us from German and from English universities (with the partial aid of anti-Catholic academic forces within Catholic countries) during the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century.

There went with this strange way of rewriting history a flood of wild hypotheses presented as fact. Thus Parliaments (till lately admired) were imagined—and therefore stated—to be Teutonic, non-Roman, therefore non-Catholic in origin. The gradual decline of slavery was attributed to the same miraculous powers in the northern pagans; and in general whatever thing was good in itself or was consonant with modern ideas, was referred back to this original source of good in the business of Europe: the German tribes.

Meanwhile the religious hatred these false historians had of civilization, that is, of Roman tradition and the Church, showed itself in a hundred other ways: the conquest of Spain by the Mohammedans was represented by them as the victory of a superior people over a degraded and contemptible one: the Reconquest of Spain by our race over the Asiatics as a disaster: its final triumphant instrument, the Inquisition, which saved Spain from a Moorish ravage was made out a monstrosity. Every revolt, however obscure, against the unity of European civilization in the Middle Ages (notably the worst revolt of all, the Albigensian), was presented as a worthy uplifting of the human mind against conditions of bondage. Most remarkable of all, the actual daily life of Catholic Europe, the habit, way of thought and manner of men, during the period of unity—from, say, the eighth century to the fifteenth—was simply omitted!

At the moment when history was struggling to become a scientific study, this school of self-pleasing fairy tales held the field. When at last history *did* become a true scientific study, this school collapsed. But it yet retains, as an inheritance from its old hegemony, a singular power in the lower and more popular forms of historical writing; and where the English language is spoken it is, even today, almost the only view of European development which the general student can obtain.

It will be noted at the outset that the whole of the fantastic picture which this old and now discredited theory presented, is based upon a certain conception of what happened at the breakdown of the Roman Empire.

Unless these barbaric German tribes *did* come in and administrate, unless they really *were* very considerable in number, unless their character in truth *was* what this school postulated it to be—vigorous, young, virtuous and all the rest of it—unless there *did indeed* take place a struggle between this imaginary great German nation and the Mediterranean civilization, in which the former won and ruled as conquerors over subject peoples; unless these primary axioms have some historical truth in them, the theory which is deduced from them has no historical value whatsoever.

A man may have a preference, as a Protestant or merely as an inhabitant of North Germany or Scandinavia, for the type of man who originally lived his degraded life outside the Roman Empire. He may, as an anti-Catholic of any kind, hope that civilization was decadent through Catholicism at the end of the united Roman Empire, and it may please him to imagine that the coincidence of what was originally barbaric with what is now Protestant German Europe is a proof of the former's original prowess. Nay, he may even desire that the non-Catholic and non-traditional type in our civilization shall attain to a supremacy which it certainly has not yet reached.¹ But the whole thing is only a pleasant (or unpleasant) dream, something to imagine and not something to discover, unless we have a solid historical foundation for the theory: to wit, the destruction of the Roman Empire in the way which, and by the men whom, the theory presupposes.

The validity of the whole scheme depends upon our answer to the question, "What was the fall of the Roman Empire?"

If it was a conquest such as we have just seen postulated, and a conquest actuated by the motives of men so described, then this old anti-Catholic school, though it could not maintain its exaggerations (though, for instance, it could not connect representative institutions with the German barbarians) would yet be substantially true.

Now the moment documents began to be seriously examined and compared, the moment modern research began to approach some sort of finality

¹I wrote that phrase before the break up of Prussia and at a moment when Prussia was still the idol of Oxford.

in the study of that period wherein the United Roman Empire of the West was replaced by sundry local Kingdoms, students of history thenceforward (and in proportion to their impartiality) became more and more convinced that the whole of this anti-Catholic attitude reposed upon nothing more than assertion.

There was no conquest of effete Mediterranean peoples by vigorous barbarians. The vast number of barbarians who lived as slaves within the Empire, the far smaller number who were pressed or hired into the military service of the Empire, the still smaller number which entered the Empire as marauders, during the weakness of the Central Government towards its end, were not of the sort which this anti-Catholic theory, mistaking its desires for realities, pre-supposed.

The barbarians were not "Germans" (a term difficult to define), they were of very mixed stocks which, if we go by speech (a bad guide to race) were some of them Germanic, some Slav, some even Mongol, some Berber, some of the old unnamed races: the Picts, for instance, and the dark men of the extreme North and West.

They had no conspicuous respect for women of the sort which should produce the chivalric ideal.

They were not free societies, but slave-owning societies.

They did not desire, attempt, or even dream, the destruction of the Imperial power: that misfortune—which was gradual and never complete—in so far as it came about at all, came about in spite of the barbarians and not by their conscious effort.

They were not numerous; on the contrary, they were but handfuls of men, even when they appeared as successful pillagers and raiders over the frontiers. When they came in large numbers, they were wiped out.

They did not introduce any new institutions or any new ideas.

Again, you do not find, in that capital change from the old civilization to the Dark Ages, that the rise of legend and of the romantic and adventurous spirit (the sowing of the modern seed) coincides with places where the great mass of barbaric slaves are settled, or where the fewer barbaric pillagers or the regular barbaric soldiers in the Roman Army pass. Romance appears hundreds of years later, and it *appears more immediately and earliest in connection with precisely those districts in which the passage of the few Teutonic, Slavonic and other barbarians had been least felt.*

There is no link between barbaric society and the feudalism of the Middle Ages; there is no trace of such a link. There is, on the contrary, a very definite and clearly marked historical sequence between Roman civilization and the feudal system, attested by innumerable documents which, once read and compared in their order, leave no sort of doubt that feudalism and the mediæval civilization repose on purely Roman origins.

In a word, the gradual cessation of central Imperial rule in Western Europe, the failure of the power and habit of one united organization seated

in Rome to color, define and administrate the lives of men, was an internal revolution; it did not come from without. It was a change from within; it was nothing remotely resembling an external, still less a barbaric, conquest from without.

All that happened was that Roman civilization having grown very old, failed to maintain that vigorous and universal method of local government subordinated to the capital, which it had for four or five hundred years supported. The machinery of taxation gradually weakened; the whole of central bureaucratic action weakened; the greater men in each locality began to acquire a sort of independence, and sundry soldiers benefited by the slow (and enormous) change, occupied the local "palaces" as they were called, of Roman administration, secured such revenues as the remains of Roman taxation could give them, and, conversely, had thrust upon them so much of the duty of government as the decline of civilization could still maintain. That is what happened, and that is all that happened.

As an historical phenomenon it is what I have called it—enormous. It most vividly struck the imagination of men. The tremors and the occasional local cataclysms which were the symptoms of this change of base from the old high civilization to the Dark Ages, singularly impressed the numerous and prolific writers of the time. Their terrors, their astonishment, their speculations as to the result, have come down to us highly emphasized. We feel after all those centuries the shock which was produced on the literary world of the day by Alaric's sack of Rome, or by the march of the Roman auxiliary troops called "Visigoths" through Gaul into Spain, or by the appearance of the mixed horde called—after their leaders—"Vandals" in front of Hippo in Africa. But what we do *not* feel, what we do *not* obtain from the contemporary documents, what was a mere figment of the academic brain in the generation now just passing away, is that anti-Catholic and anti-civilized bias which would represent the ancient civilization as conquered by men of another and of a better stock who have since developed the supreme type of modern civilization, and whose contrast with the Catholic world and Catholic tradition is at once applauded as the principle of life in Europe and emphasized as the fundamental fact in European history.

The reader will not be content with a mere affirmation, though the affirmation is based upon all that is worth counting in modern scholarship. He will ask what, then, did really happen? After all, Alaric did sack Rome. The Kings of the Franks were Belgian chieftains, probably speaking (at first) Flemish as well as Latin. Those of the Burgundians were probably men who spoke that hotchpotch of original barbaric, Celtic and Roman words later called "Teutonic dialects," as well as Latin. The military officers called (from the original recruitment of their commands) "Goths," both eastern and western, were in the same case. Even that mixed mass of Slav, Berber, escaped slaves and the rest which, from original leaders was called in North Africa "Vandal," probably had some considerable German nucleus.

The false history has got superficial ground to work upon. Many families whose origins came from what is now German-speaking Central Europe ruled in local government during the transition, and distinct though small tribes, mainly German in speech, survived for a short time in the Empire. Like all falsehood, the falsehood of the "Teutonic theory" could not live without an element of truth to distort, and it is the business of anyone who is writing true history, even in so short an essay as this, to show what that ground was and how it has been misrepresented.

In order to understand what happened we must first of all clearly represent to ourselves the fact that the structure upon which our united civilization had in its first five centuries reposed, was the *Roman Army*. By which I do not mean that the number of soldiers was very large compared with the civilian population, but that the organ which was vital in the State, the thing that really counted, the institution upon which men's minds turned, and which they thought of as the foundation of all, was the military institution.

The original city-state of the Mediterranean broke down a little before the beginning of our era.

When (as always ultimately happens in a complex civilization of many millions) self-government had broken down, and when it was necessary, after the desperate faction fights which that breakdown had produced, to establish a strong centre of authority, the obvious and, as it were, necessary person to exercise that authority (in a State constituted as was the Roman State) was the Commander-in-Chief of the army; all that the word "Emperor"—the Latin word *Imperator*—means, is a commander-in-chief.

It was the Army which made and unmade Emperors; it was the Army which designed and ordered and even helped to construct the great roads of the Empire. It was in connection with the needs of the Army that those roads were traced. It was the Army which secured (very easily, for peace was popular) the civil order of the vast organism. It was the Army especially which guarded its frontiers against the uncivilized world without; upon the edge of the Sahara and of the Arabian desert; upon the edge of the Scotch mountains; upon the edge of the poor, wild lands between the Rhine and Elbe. On those frontiers the garrisons made a sort of wall within which wealth and right living could accumulate, outside which small and impoverished bodies of men destitute of the arts (notably of writing) save in so far as they rudely copied the Romans or were permeated by adventurous Roman commerce, lived under conditions which, in the Celtic hills, we can partially appreciate from the analogy of ancient Gaul and from tenacious legends, but of which in the German and Slavonic sand-plains, marshes and woods we know hardly anything at all.

Now this main instrument, the Roman Army—the instrument remember, which not only preserved civil functions, but actually created the master of all civic functions, the Government—went through three very clear stages of change in the first four centuries of the Christian era—up to the year A.D. 400

or so. And it is the transformation of the Roman Army during the first four centuries which explains the otherwise inexplicable change in society just afterwards, in the fifth and sixth centuries—that is, from 400 to 600 A.D. The turn from the full civilization of Rome to the beginning of the Dark Ages.

In its first stage, during the early Empire, just as the Catholic Church was founded and was beginning to grow, the Roman Army was still theoretically an army of true Roman citizens.²

As a matter of fact the Army was already principally professional, and it was being recruited even in this first stage very largely from the territories Rome had conquered.

Thus we have Cæsar raising a Gallic legion almost contemporaneous with his conquest of Gaul. But for a long time after, well into the Christian era, the Army was conceived of in men's minds as a sort of universal institution rooted in the citizenship which men were still proud to claim throughout the Empire, and which belonged only to a minority of its inhabitants; for the majority were slaves.

In the second phase (which corresponded with the beginning of a decline in letters and in the arts, which carries us through the welter of civil wars in the third century and which introduces the remodeled Empire at their close) the Army was becoming purely professional and at the same time drawn from whatever was least fortunate in Roman society. The recruitment of it was treated much after the fashion of a tax; the great landed proprietors (who, by a parallel development in the decline, were becoming the chief economic feature in the Roman State) were summoned to send a certain number of recruits from their estates.

Slaves would often be glad to go, for, hard as were the conditions of military service, it gave them civic freedom, certain honors, a certain pay, and a future for their children. The poorer freed men would also go at the command of their lord (though only of course a certain proportion—for the conscription was very light compared with modern systems, and was made lighter by reë enlistment, long service, absence of reserves, and the use of veterans).

During this second stage, while the Army was becoming less and less civic, and more and more a profession for the destitute and the unfortunate, the unpopularity and the ignorance of military service among the rest of the population, was increasing. The average citizen grew more and more divorced from the Army and knew less and less of its conditions. He came to regard it partly as a necessary police force or defence of his frontiers, partly as a nuisance to him at home. He also came to regard it as something with which he had nothing to do. It lived a life separate from himself. It governed (through

²A soldier was still technically a citizen up to the very end. The conception of a soldier as a citizen, the impossibility, for instance, of his being a slave, was in the very bones of Roman thought. Even when the soldiers were almost entirely recruited from barbarians, that is, from slave stock, the soldiers themselves were free citizens always.

the power of the Emperor, its chief); it depended on, and also supported or re-made, the Imperial Court. But it was external, at the close of the Empire, to general society.

Recruiting was meanwhile becoming difficult, and *the habit grew up of offering the hungry tribes outside the pale of the Empire the advantage of residence within it on condition that they should serve as Roman soldiers.*

The conception of territories within the Empire which were affiliated and allied to it rather than absorbed by it, was a very ancient one. That conception had lost reality so far as the old territories it had once affected were concerned; but it paved the way for the parallel idea of troops affiliated and allied to the Roman Army, part of that army in discipline and organization, yet possessed of considerable freedom within their own divisions.

Here we have not only a constant and increasing use of barbaric troops drafted into the regular corps, but also *whole bodies which were more and more frequently accepted "en bloc" and, under their local leaders, as auxiliaries to the Roman forces.*

Some such bodies appear to have been settled upon land on the frontiers, to others were given similar grants at very great distances from the frontiers. Thus we have a small body of German barbarians settled at Rennes in Brittany. And, again, within the legions (who were all technically of Roman citizenship and in theory recruited from the full civilization of Rome), the barbarian who happened to find himself within that civilization tended more than did his non-barbarian fellow citizen (or fellow slave) to accept military service. He would nearly always be poorer; he would, unless his experience of civilization was a long one, feel the hardship of military service less; and in this second phase, while the army was becoming more sedentary (more attached, that is, to particular garrisons), more permanent, more of an hereditary thing handed on from father to son, and distinguished by the large element of what we call "married quarters," it was also becoming more and more an army of men who, whether as auxiliaries or as true Roman soldiers, were in *blood, descent, and to some extent in manners and less in language, barbarians.* There were negroes, there were probably Celts, there were Slavs, Mongols of the Steppes, more numerous Germans, and so forth.

In the third stage, which is the stage that saw the great convulsion of the fifth century, the army though not yet wholly barbaric, had already become in its most vital part, barbaric. It took its orders, of course, wholly from the Roman State, but great groups within it were only partly even Latin-speaking or Greek-speaking, and were certainly regarded both by themselves and by their Roman masters as non-Roman in manners and in blood.

It must most clearly be emphasized that not only no such thought as an attack upon the Empire entered the heads of these soldiers, but that the very idea of it would have been inconceivable to them. Had you proposed it they would not even have known what you meant. That a particular section of the army should fight against a particular claimant to the Empire (and therefore

and necessarily in favor of some other claimant) they thought natural enough; but to talk of an attack upon the Empire itself would have seemed to them like talking of an attack upon bread and meat, air, water and fire. The Empire was the whole method and meaning of their lives.

At intervals the high and wealthy civilization of the Roman Empire was, of course, subjected to attempted pillage by small and hungry robber bands without its boundaries, but that had nothing to do with the barbaric recruitment of the Roman Army save when such bands were caught and incorporated. The army was always ready at a moment's order to cut such foreign raiders to pieces—and always did so successfully.

The portion of the Army chosen to repel, cut up, and sell into slavery a marauding band of Slavs or Germans or Celts, always had Celts or Slavs or Germans present in large numbers among its own soldiery. But no tie of blood interfered with the business. To consider such a thing would have been inconceivable to the opponents on either side. The distinction was not between speech and speech, still less between vague racial customs. It was a distinction between the Imperial Service on the one side, against the outer, unrecognized, savage on the other.

As the machinery of Government grew weak through old age, and as the recruitment of the Army from barbarians and the large proportion of auxiliary regular forces began to weaken that basis of the whole State, the tendency of pillaging bands to break in past the frontiers into the cultivated lands and the wealth of the cities, grew greater and greater; but it never occurred to them to attack the Empire as such. All they wanted was permission to enjoy the life which was led within it, and to abandon the wretched conditions to which they were compelled outside its boundaries.

Sometimes they were transformed from pillagers to soldiers by an offer extended by the Roman authorities; more often they snatched a raid when there was for the moment no good garrison in their neighborhood. Then a Roman force would march against them, and if they were not quick at getting away would cut them to pieces. But with the progress of the central decline the attacks of these small bands on the frontiers became more frequent. Frontier towns came to regard such attacks as a permanent peril and to defend themselves against them. Little groups of raiders would sometimes traverse great districts from end to end, and whether in the form of pirates from the sea or of war bands on land, the ceaseless attempts to enjoy or to loot (but principally to enjoy) the conditions that civilization offered, grew more and more persistent.

It must not be imagined, of course, that civilization had not occasionally to suffer then, as it had had to suffer at intervals for a thousand years past, the

attacks of really large and organized barbaric armies.³ Thus in the year 404, driven by the pressure of an Eastern invasion upon their own forests, a vast barbaric host under one Radagasius pushed into Italy. The men bearing arms alone were estimated (in a time well used to soldiery and to such estimates) at 200,000.

But those 200,000 were wiped out. The barbarians were always wiped out when they attempted to come as conquerors. Stilicho (a typical figure, for he was himself of barbarian descent, yet in the regular Roman service) cut to pieces one portion of them, the rest surrendered and were sold off and scattered as slaves.

Immediately afterwards you have a violent quarrel between various soldiers who desire to capture the Imperial power. The story is fragmentary and somewhat confused: now one usurper is blamed, and now another, but the fact common to all is that with the direct object of usurping power a Roman General calls in barbarian bands of pillagers (all sorts of small groups, Franks, Suevians, Vandals) to cross the Rhine into Gaul, *not* as barbarian “conquerors,” but as allies, to help in a civil war.

The succeeding generation has left us ample evidence of the results. It presents us with documents that do not give a picture of a ruined province by any means; only of a province which has been traversed in certain directions by the march of barbarian robber bands, who afterwards disappeared, largely in fighting among themselves.

We have, later, the very much more serious business of the Mongol Attila and his Huns, leading the great outer mass of Germans and Slavs into the Empire on an enormous raid. In the middle of the fifth century, fifty years after the destruction of Radagasius, these Asiatics, leading more numerous other barbaric dependents of theirs from the Germanies and the eastern Slavonic lands, penetrated for two brief moments into Northern Italy and Eastern Gaul. The end of that business—ininitely graver though it was than the raids that came before it—is just what one might have expected. The regular and auxiliary disciplined forces of the Empire destroy the barbarian power near Chalons, and the last and worst of the invasions is wiped out as thoroughly as had been all the others.

In general, the barbaric eruptions into the Empire failed wholly as soon as Imperial troops could be brought up to oppose them.

What, then, were the supposed barbaric successes? What was the real nature of the action of Alaric, for instance, and his sack of Rome; and how, later, do we find local “kings” in the place of the Roman Governors?

The real nature of the action of men like Alaric is utterly different from the imaginary picture with which the *old* picturesque popular history recently

³For instance, a century and a half before the breakdown of central Government, the Goths, a barbaric group, largely German, had broken in and ravaged in a worse fashion than their successors in the fifth century.

provided us. That false history gives us the impression of a barbarian Chieftain gathering his Clan to a victorious assault on Rome. Consider the truth upon Alaric and contrast it with this imaginary picture.

Alaric was a young noble of Gothic blood, but from birth a Roman; at eighteen years of age he was put by the Court in command of a small Roman auxiliary force *originally* recruited from the Goths. He was as much a Roman officer, as incapable of thinking of himself in any other terms than those of the Roman Army, as any other one of his colleagues about the throne. He had his commission from the Emperor Theodosius, and when Theodosius marched into Gaul against the usurper Eugenius, he counted Alaric's division as among the most faithful of his Army.

It so happened, moreover, that those few original auxiliaries—mainly Goths by race—were nearly all destroyed in the campaign. Alaric survived. The remnant of his division was recruited, we know not how, but probably from all kinds of sources, to its old strength. It was still called "Gothic," though now of the most mixed origin, and it was still commanded by himself in his character of a Roman General.

Alaric, after this service to the Emperor, was rewarded by further military dignities in the Roman military hierarchy. He was ambitious of military titles and of important command, as are all soldiers.

Though still under twenty years of age and only a commander of auxiliaries, he asks for the title of *Magister Militum*, with the dignity which accompanied that highest of military posts. The Emperor refuses it. One of the Ministers thereupon begins to plot with Alaric, and suggests to him that he might gather other auxiliary troops under his command, and make things uncomfortable for his superiors. Alaric rebels, marches through the Balkan Peninsula into Thessaly and Greece, and down into the Peloponesus; the regulars march against him (according to some accounts) and beat him back into Albania.

There ends his first adventure. It is exactly like that of a hundred other Roman generals in the past, and so are his further adventures. He remains in Albania at the head of his forces, and makes peace with the Government—still enjoying a regular commission from the Emperor.

He next tries a new adventure to serve his ambition in Italy, but his army is broken to pieces at Pollentia by the armies in Italy—under a general, by the way, as barbaric in mere descent as was Alaric, but, like Alaric, wholly Roman in training and ideas.

The whole thing is a civil war between various branches of the Roman service, and is motivated, like all the Roman civil wars for hundreds of years before, by the ambitions of generals.

Alaric does not lose his commission even after his second adventure; he begins to intrigue between the Western and Eastern heads of the Roman Empire. The great invasion under Radagastius interrupts this civil war. That invasion was for Alaric, of course, as for any other Roman officer, an invasion

of barbaric enemies. That these enemies should be called by this or that barbaric name is quite indifferent to him. They come from outside the Empire and are therefore, in his eyes, cattle. He helps to destroy them, and destroyed they are—promptly and thoroughly.

When the brief invasion was over, Alaric had the opportunity to renew the civil wars within the Empire, and asked for certain arrears of pay that were due to him. Stilicho, the great rival general (himself, by the way, a Vandal in descent), admitted Alaric's right to arrears of pay, but just at that moment there occurred an obscure palace intrigue which was based, like all the real movements of the time, on differences of religion, not of race. Stilicho, suspected of attempting to restore paganism, is killed. In the general confusion certain of the families of the auxiliaries garrisoned in Italy are massacred by the non-military population. As Alaric is a general in partial rebellion against the Imperial authority, these auxiliaries join him.

The total number of Alaric's men was at this moment very small; they were perhaps 30,000. There was no trace of nationality about them. They were simply a body of discontented soldiers; they had not come from across the frontier; they were not invaders; they were part of the long established and regular garrisons of the Empire; and, for that matter, many garrisons and troops of equally barbaric origin, sided with the regular authorities in the quarrel. Alaric marches on Rome with this disaffected Roman Army, claiming that he has been defrauded of his due in salary, and leaning upon the popularity of the dead Stilicho, whose murder he says he will avenge. His thirty thousand claim the barbarian slaves within the city, and certain sums of money which had been the pretext and motive of his rebellion.

As a result of this action the Emperor promises Alaric his regular salary as a general, and a district which he may not only command, but plant with his few followers. Even in the height of his success, Alaric again demands the thing which was nearest his heart, the supreme and entirely Roman title of *Magister Militum*, the highest post in the hierarchy of military advancement. But the Emperor again refuses to give that. Alaric again marches on Rome, a Roman officer followed by a rebellious Roman Army. He forces the Senate to make Attalus nominal Emperor of the West, and Attalus to give him the desired title, his very craving for which is most significant of the Roman character of the whole business. Alaric then quarrels with his puppet, deprives him of the insignia of the Empire, and sends them to Honorius; quarrels again with Honorius, reënters Rome and pillages it, marches to Southern Italy, dies, and his small army is dismembered.

There is the story of Alaric as it appears from documents and as it was in reality. There is the truth underlying the false picture with which most educated men were recently provided by the anti-Roman bias of recent history.

Certainly the story of Alaric's discontent with his salary and the terms of his commission, his raiding marches, his plunder of the capital, shows how vastly different was the beginning of the fifth century from the society of

three hundred years before. It is symptomatic of the change, and it could only have been possible at a moment when central government was at last breaking down. But it is utterly different in motive and in social character from the vague customary conception of a vast barbarian "invasion," led by a German "war lord" pouring over the Alps and taking Roman society and its capital by storm. It has no relation to such a picture.

If all this be true of the dramatic adventure of Alaric, which has so profoundly affected the imagination of mankind, it is still truer of the other contemporary events which false history might twist into a "conquest" of the Empire by the barbarian.

There was no such conquest. All that happened was an internal transformation of Roman society, in which the chief functions of local government fell to the heads of local auxiliary forces in the Roman Army. As these auxiliary forces were now mainly barbaric, so were the personalities of the new local governors.

I have only dealt with the particular case of Alaric because it is the most familiar, and the most generally distorted: a test, as it were, of my theme.

But what is true of him is true of all other auxiliaries in the Armies—even of the probably Slavonic Vandals. These did frankly loot a province—North Africa—and they (and they alone of the auxiliary troops) did revolt against the Imperial system and defy it for a century: but the Vandals themselves were already, before their adventure, a part of the Imperial forces; they were but a nucleus for a mixed host made up of all the varied elements of rebellion present in the country; and their experiment in separation went down at last forever before the Imperial armies. Meanwhile the North African society on which the rebels lived, and which, with their various recruits—Moors, escaped slaves, criminals—they maladministered and half ruined, was and remained Roman.

In the case of local Italian government the case is quite clear. There was never any question of "invasion" or "conquest."

Odoacer held a regular Roman commission; he was a Roman soldier: Theodoric supplanted him by leave of, and actually under orders from, the Emperor. The last and greatest example, the most permanent, Gaul, tells the same story. The Burgundians are auxiliaries regularly planted after imploring the aid of the Empire and permission to settle. Clovis, the Belgian Fleming, fights no Imperial Army. His forebears were Roman officials: his little band of perhaps 8,000 men was victorious in a small and private civil war which made him Master in the North over other rival generals. He defended the Empire against the Eastern barbaric German tribes. He rejoiced in the titles of Consul and Patrician.

There was no destruction of Roman society, there was no breach of continuity in the main institutions of what was now the Western Christian world; there was no considerable admixture (in these local civil wars) of German, Slav, or outer Celtic blood—no appreciable addition at least to the large

amount of such blood which, through the numerous soldiers and much more numerous slaves, had already been incorporated with the population of the Roman world.

But in the course of this transformation in the fifth and sixth centuries local government *did* fall into the hands of those who happened to command the main local forces of the Roman Army, and these were by descent barbarian because the Army had become barbarian in its recruitment.

Why local government gradually succeeded the old centralized Imperial Government, and how, in consequence, there slowly grew up the modern nations, we will next examine.



The text of *Europe and the Faith*, written by Hilaire Belloc, is in the public domain in the United States.

You can get a free version of the whole book in plain text at:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/8442>

This PDF sample of *Europe and the Faith* was typeset with L^AT_EX by Bill Powell at Wineskin Media, <http://wineskinmedia.com>, and may be freely distributed for any noncommercial purpose. The page dimensions chosen are standard for the book publishing industry, 6 inches by 9 inches.

Please contact me if you're interested in a professional, proofread, printer-ready PDF with which to make a book from this or another fine text.