The Story of Western Civilization Volume Five

The Story of the

illiddle Ages

Christine Miller

A Revised and Expanded Edition of The Story of the English and The Story of Old France by H. A. Guerber

INTRODUCTION

BOYS and girls—and grown folks also—often turn first to the last chapter of a book, before reading it, to see how it "ends." At times this is a good idea; for when we know the end of a story, we can often better understand it as it is told. This then is what we will do in this book. We will first see what the "end" of the story of the Middle Ages is; then, as we read, we shall better understand how that end was brought about.

When Columbus in the year 1492 returned from his voyage of discovery, a keen rivalry began among the Old World nations for the possession of the New World. Expedition followed expedition; Spaniards, Portuguese, French, English, and later the Dutch and Swedes,—all began to strive with one another for the wealth and dominion of the newfound lands; and American history—our own history—begins.

But who were these Spaniards and Portuguese, these Englishmen and Frenchmen, these Dutchmen and Swedes? In the old days when the might and power of Rome ruled over the world, we hear nothing of them. Whence had they come? Were

they entirely new peoples who had had no part in the old world of the Greeks and Romans? Were they the descendants of the old peoples over whom the Emperors had ruled from the city of the Seven Hills? Or did they arise by a mingling of the old and the new? Then, if they were the result of a mingling, where had the new races dwelt during the long years that Rome was spreading her empire over the known world? When and how had the mingling taken place? What, too, had become of "The Glory that was Greece, the grandeur that was Rome"? Why was America not discovered and settled before? What were the customs, the ideas, the institutions which these peoples brought with them when they settled here? In short, what had been the history and what was the condition of the nations which, after 1492, began the struggle for the mastery of the New World?

To such questions it is the aim of this book to give an answer. It will try to show how the power of Rome fell before the attacks of German barbarians, and how, in the long course of the Middle Ages, new peoples, new states, a new civilization, arose on the ruins of the old.

At the beginning of the period Rome was old and worn out with misgovernment and evil living. But planted in this dying Rome there was the new and vigorous Christian Church which was to draw up into itself all that was best and strongest of the old world. The Germans were rude and uncivilized, but they were strong in mind and body, and possessed some ideas about government, women,

INTRODUCTION

and the family which were better than the ideas of the Romans on these subjects.

When the Germans conquered the Romans, and settled within the bounds of the Empire, it might well have seemed that the end of the world was come. Cities were plundered and destroyed; priceless works of art were dashed to pieces; and the inhabitants of many lands were slain or enslaved. For nearly a thousand years Europe did not entirely recover from the shock; and the period which immediately follows the invasions of the barbarians is so dreary and sad that historians have called it "the Dark Ages."

But what was best in the old Greek and Roman civilization did not wholly perish. The Christian Church, too, grew steadily stronger, and sought to soften and civilize the rude Germans. The Germans, in turn, did not lose their vigor or their good ideas. At last from the combination of all these elements a new civilization arose,—stronger, better, and capable of higher development than the old,—and the Middle Ages were past. Then and only then could—and did—the new nations, which meanwhile had slowly been forming, set out on their careers of discovery and exploration which have made our New World possible.

So, we may say, the Middle Ages were the period when Europe became Europe, and made ready to found new Europes in America, in Australia, and in Africa. It was the growing-time for all the great harvest which has come since that time.

WE must begin our story with those new races which were to mix their blood with that of the peoples of the Roman Empire, and form the nations of Europe to-day. These were the ancient Germans, the ancestors of the peoples who now speak German, English, Dutch, and Scandinavian. They lived then,—as part of their descendants still do,—in the lands extending from the North Sea and the Baltic on the North, to the Danube River on the South; and from the Rhine on the West, to the rivers Elbe and Oder on the East. This region is now one of the most flourishing countries in all the world, with many great cities and millions of inhabitants. At that time it had no cities at all and but few inhabitants. The people had just begun to settle down and cultivate the soil, where before they had moved from place to place to find fresh pasturage for their flocks and better hunting. The surface of the country was still almost as Nature had made it. Gloomy forests stretched for miles and miles where now there are sunny fields, and wide and treacherous marshes lay where the land now stands firm and solid.

In this wild country, for many years, the Germans had room to live their own life. To the East were the Slavs, a people still ruder and more uncivilized than themselves. To the West were the Gauls, in what is now France. To the South were provinces of the Roman Empire, separated from them by the broad stream of the river Danube.



AN OLD GERMAN VILLAGE

The Germans, the Gauls, the Slavs, and the Romans,—though they did not know it,—might all call themselves cousins; for most of the peoples of Europe are descended from one great race, called the Aryans. Long before Athens or Rome was built, before the Germans had come into this land, before any nation had begun to keep a written account of its deeds, the forefathers of these peoples dwelt together somewhere in western Asia or eastern Europe. At last, for reasons which we cannot know after

so great a stretch of time, these Aryan peoples separated and moved away in different directions. One branch of them entered Italy and became the ancestors of the Greeks and Romans. Another entered what is now France, and became the Gauls whom Caesar conquered. One settled in Germany, and still others settled in other lands both near and far.

In spite of the kinship between them, however, the Germans and Romans were very different in many ways. The Romans were short and dark, while the Germans were tall—very tall, they seemed to the Romans,—with fair skin, light hair, and clear blue eyes. The clothing of the Germans, unlike that of the Romans, was made chiefly from the skins of animals. Usually it did not cover the whole body, the arms and shoulders at least being left free. When the German was in a lazy mood he would sit for days by the fire, clad only in a long cloak of skins; then when he prepared to hunt or to fight, he would put on close-fitting garments and leave his cloak behind.

The houses in which the Germans lived were mere cabins or huts. Nothing was used but wood and that was not planed smooth, but was roughly hewn into boards and timbers. Sometimes a cave would be used for a dwelling, and often a house of timber would have an underground room attached to it; this was for warmth in winter and also for protection against their enemies. Sometimes in summer the people made huts of twigs woven together in much the same way that a basket is

woven. Such houses were very flimsy, but they had the advantage of being easily moved from place to place. Often, too, the house sheltered not only the family, but the horses and cattle as well, all living under one roof. One can imagine that this was not a very healthful plan.

The Germans gained their living partly from hunting and partly from tilling the soil. They also depended a great deal upon their herds and flocks for meat, as well as for milk and the foods which they made from milk. The Germans paid great respect to their women, and the latter could often by their reproaches stop the men when defeated and in flight, and encourage them to do battle again. Nevertheless, the care of the cattle and the tilling of the soil, as well as the house-work, fell chiefly to the women. The men preferred to hunt or to fight; and when not doing either, would probably be found by the fire sleeping or idling away their time in games of chance. Most of the occupations of which we now see so much were not known to them. There was hardly any trading either among themselves or with other nations. Each family made its own things, and made very little more than it needed for its own use. The women spun and wove linen and other cloth, tanned leather, made soap,-which the Greeks and Romans did not know,-and a few other things. But all this was only for use in their own families. There were no trading places, and almost no commerce, except in a few things such as skins, and the amber of the Baltic Sea. One occupation, however, was considered good enough for any man to follow. This

was the trade of the blacksmith. The skillful smith was highly honored, for he not only made tools to work with, but also weapons with which to hunt and to fight.

But usually the free man considered it beneath his dignity to work in any way. He was a warrior more than anything else. The Romans had reason to know that the Germans were very stubborn fighters; indeed, the Romans never did conquer Germany. The Germans were not made weak, as the Romans were, by indulging in all kinds of luxuries. They lived in the open air, they ate plain food, and they did not make their bodies tender by too much clothing. In every way their habits were more wholesome than those of the Romans; and besides this, each man had a spirit of independence that caused him to fight hard to avoid capture and slavery.

At one time, while Augustus was Emperor, three legions of the Roman army, under an officer named Varus, were entrapped and slain in the German forests. The shock of this defeat was felt so keenly at Rome that long after that the Emperor would awake at night from restless sleep, and cry out: "Varus, Varus, give me back my legions!" After this the Romans learned to be more careful in fighting the Germans. The Romans had the advantage of better weapons with which to fight, better knowledge of how to fight, and greater wealth with which to carry on a war. So, in spite of some decided victories over the soldiers of the Empire, the Germans were obliged for many years to acknowledge Rome as the stronger; and Roman soldiers

were even stationed in some parts of the German territory.

When the German army was preparing for battle, the men arranged themselves so that each line had a greater number in it and was longer than the one in front. Thus the army formed a sort of wedge, which they called the "boar's head," from its shape. Arranged in this manner the army moved forward with one grand rush, guarding their sides with large wooden shields, and hewing with their swords and thrusting with their spears. If the first rush failed to dismay the enemy and turn them in flight, there was no longer any order or plan of battle. Each man then fought for himself, until victory or defeat ended the struggle.

Among the Germans no man dared to flee from the field of battle, for cowardice was punished with death. To leave one's shield behind was the greatest of crimes, and made a man disgraced in the sight of all. Bravery was the chief of virtues, and it was this alone which could give a man the leadership of an army. The general was chosen for his valor, and he kept his position only so long as he continued to show himself brave. He must be an example to all his followers and must fight in the front ranks. A general was made by his fellow warriors, who raised him upon their shields as a sign of their choice. If he proved less worthy than they had thought, they could as easily make another general in his place. The leader and his men were constantly reminded that upon their strength and courage depended the safety and happiness of their

wives and children; for their families often followed the army to battle, and witnessed the combats from rude carts or wagons, mingling their shrill cries with the din of battle.

Times of peace among these early Germans would seem to us much like war. Every man carried his weapons about with him and used them freely. Human life was held cheap, and a quarrel was often settled by the sword. There was no strong government to punish wrong and protect the weak; so men had to protect and help themselves. A man was bound to take up the quarrels, or feuds, of his family and avenge by blood a wrong done to any of his relatives. As a result there was constant fighting. Violent deeds were frequent, and their punishment was light. If a man injured another, or even committed murder, the law might be satisfied and the offender excused, by the payment of a fine to the injured man, or to his family.

Some tribes of Germans had kings, but others had not, and were ruled by persons chosen in the meetings of the people, or "folk." Even among those tribes that had kings, the power of the ruler in time of peace was not very great. The kings were not born kings, but were chosen by the consent of the people. Some few families, because they had greater wealth, or for some other reason, were looked upon with such respect that they were considered noble, and kings were chosen from among their number. Yet each man stood upon his own merits, too; and neither wealth nor birth could keep a king in power if he proved evil in rule or weak in battle. The rulers

decided only the matters that were of small importance. When it came to serious matters, such as making war or changing the customs of the tribe, the "folk" assembled together decided for itself. In their assemblies they showed disapproval by loud murmurs; while to signify approval, they clashed their shields and spears together. Every free man had the right to attend the folk-meeting of his district, and also the general assembly of the whole tribe. The power of the king was less than that of the assembly, and he was subject to it; for the assembly could depose the king, as well as elect him. In times of war, however the power of the kings was much increased; for then it was necessary that one man should do the planning, and time could not be taken up with assemblies.

At the period of which we are speaking, the Germans did not believe in one God as we do, but many. The names of some of their gods are preserved in the names which we have for the days of the week. From the god Tius comes Tuesday, from Woden comes Wednesday, and from Thor comes Thursday. Tius was the god of the heavens, and was at first the chief of the gods. Songs were sung in his honor, palaces named for him, and even human beings were sacrificed to him. Woden was afterward worshiped as the god of the sky, and also of the winds. Because he controlled the winds, it was natural that he should be the special god to whom those people looked who depended upon the sea; therefore he became the protector of sailors. He was also the god of war, and the spear was his emblem.

After the worship of Tius died out, Woden became the chief god of the Germans. To him also there were sacrifices of human beings. Next in importance to Woden was Thor, the god of thunder and also of the household. His emblem was a hammer. When it thundered the people said that Thor with his hammer was fighting the ice-giants; so he was regarded as the enemy of winter, and the giver of good crops.

Besides these chief gods, there were many less important ones. Among these were spirits of the forests and rivers, and the "gnomes" or dwarfs who dwelt in the earth, guarding the stores of precious metals and jewels which it contains. Long after the old religion had come to an end the descendants of the ancient Germans remembered these spirits, and stories of their tricks and good deeds were handed down from father to son. In this way the Germans kept something of the old religion in the beautiful fairy tales which we still love; and in our Christmas and Easter customs we find other traces of their old beliefs and customs.

When missionaries went among them, however, they became Christians. This shows one of the greatest qualities which they possessed. They were willing and able to learn from other peoples, and to change their customs to suit new circumstances. Other races, like the American Indians, who did not learn so readily, have declined and died away when they have been brought in contact with a higher civilization. But the Germans could learn from the Greeks and the Romans; so they grew from

a rude, half-barbarous people, into great and civilized nations.

BREAKING THE FRONTIER

IF you look at the map of Europe you will see two great rivers,-the Rhine and the Danube,-flowing in opposite directions across the continent, one emptying into the North Sea and the other into the Black Sea. Their mouths are thousands of miles apart; yet when you follow up the course of each, you find that they come nearer and nearer, until, at their sources, the distance between them is no greater than a good walker might cover in a day. Thus these two rivers almost form a single line across the whole of Europe. Each in its lower course is broad and deep, and makes a good boundary for the countries on its banks. The Roman armies in the old days often crossed these rivers and indeed gained victories beyond them; but they found it so hard to keep possession of what they conquered there, that in the end they decided not to try. So for many years the Rhine and the Danube rivers formed the northern boundary of the Roman Empire.

In the last chapter you have read something of the Germans who lived north and east of this boundary. Among these peoples there was one which was to take the lead in breaking through the

BREAKING THE FRONTIER

frontier and bringing about the downfall of the great empire of Rome. This was the nation of the Goths.

In the latter part of the fourth century after Christ, the Goths dwelt along the shores of the Black Sea and just north of the lower course of the Danube River. There they had been dwelling for more than a hundred years. According to the stories which the old men had told their sons, and the sons had told their children after them, the Goths at one time had dwelt far to the North, on the shores of the Baltic. Why they left their northern home, we do not know. Perhaps it was because of a famine or a pestilence which had come upon the land; perhaps it was because of a victory or a defeat in war with their neighbors; perhaps it was because of the urging of some great leader, or because of an oracle of their gods.

At any rate, the Goths did leave their homes by the Baltic Sea, to wander southward through the forests of what is now Western Russia. After many years, they had arrived in the sunnier lands about the Danube. There they had come in contact with the Romans for the first time. For a while there had been much fighting between the two peoples; but at last the Goths had been allowed to settle down quietly in these lands, on condition that they should not cross the river Danube and enter the Roman territory. And there they had dwelt ever since, living peaceably, for the most part, alongside their Roman neighbors and learning from them many civilized ways.

The greatest thing that the Goths learned from the Romans was Christianity. Little by little they ceased worshiping Thor and Woden, and became Christians. This was chiefly due to one of their own men, named Ulfilas, who spent a number of years at Constantinople, the Roman capital of the world. There he became a Christian priest; and when he returned to his people he began to work as a missionary among them. Ulfilas had many difficulties to overcome in this work; but the chief one was that there was no Bible, or indeed any books, in the Gothic language. So Ulfilas set to work to translate the Bible from the Greek language into the Gothic. This was a hard task in itself; but it was made all the harder by the fact that before he could begin he had to invent an alphabet in which to write down the Gothic words. After the translation was made, too, he had to teach his people how to read it. In all this Ulfilas was successful; and under his wise and patient teaching the Goths rapidly became Christians. At the same time they were becoming more civilized, and their rulers were beginning to build up a great kingdom about the Danube and the Black Sea. Suddenly, however, an event happened which was to change all their later history, and indeed the history of the world as well. This was the coming of the Huns into Europe.

The Huns were not members of the great Aryan family of nations; and indeed the Germans and the Romans thought that they were scarcely human at all. They were related to the Chinese; and their strange features and customs, and their shrill

BREAKING THE FRONTIER

voices, were new to Europe. An old Gothic writer gives us a picture of them. "Nations whom they could never have defeated in fair fight," he says, "fled in horror from those frightful faces—if, indeed, I may call them faces; for they are nothing



A HUN WARRIOR

but shapeless black pieces of flesh, with little points instead of eyes. They have no hair on their cheeks or chins. Instead, the sides of their faces show deep furrowed scars; for hot irons are applied, with characteristic ferocity, to the face of every boy that is born among them, so that blood is drawn from his cheeks before he is allowed to taste his mother's milk. The men are little in size, but quick and active in their motions; and they are especially skillful in

riding. They are broad-shouldered, are good at the use of the bow and arrows, have strong necks, and are always holding their heads high in their pride. To sum up, these beings under the forms of men hide the fierce natures of beasts."

The Goths were brave, but they could not stand against such men as these. The EAST-GOTHS, who dwelt about the Black Sea, were soon conquered, and for nearly a century they continued to be subject to the Huns. The West-Goths, who dwelt about the Danube, fled in terror before the countless hordes of the new-comers, and sought a refuge within the boundaries of the Roman Empire. As many as two hundred thousand fighting men, besides thousands of old men, women, and children, gathered on the north bank of the Danube, and "stretching out their hands from afar, with loud lamentations," begged the Roman officers to permit them to cross the river and settle in the Roman lands.

The Roman Emperor, after much discussion, granted their request; but only on hard conditions, for he feared to have so many of the Goths in the land. The Gothic boys, he said, must be given up to the Romans as hostages, and the men must surrender their arms. The situation of the Goths was so serious that they were forced to agree to these terms; but many of them found means to bribe the Roman officers, to let them keep their arms with them. At last the crossing began; and for many days an army of boats was kept busy ferrying the people across the

BREAKING THE FRONTIER

stream, which at this point was more than a mile wide.

In this way the West-Goths were saved from the Huns; but they soon found that it was only to suffer many injuries at the hands of the Roman officers. The emperor had given orders that the Goths were to be fed and cared for until they could be settled on new lands; but the Roman officers stole the food intended for them, and oppressed them in other ways. Some of the Goths, indeed, fell into such distress that they sold their own children as slaves in order to get food.

This state of affairs could not last long with so war-like a people as the Goths. One day, in the midst of a banquet which the Roman governor was giving to their leader, an outcry was heard in the palace-yard, and the news came that the Goths were being attacked. At once the Gothic leader drew his sword, saying he would stop the tumult, and went out to his men.

From that time war began between the Romans and the West-Goths. About a year after this (in the year 378 A.D.) a great battle was fought near Adrianople, a city which lies about one hundred and forty miles northwest of Constantinople. The Emperor Valens was himself at the head of the Roman army. His flatterers led him to believe that there could be no doubt of his success; so Valens rashly began the battle without waiting for the troops that were coming to assist him. The Romans were at a disadvantage besides. They were hot and

tired, and their horses had had no food; the men, moreover, became crowded together into a narrow space where they could neither form their lines, nor use their swords and spears with effect. The victory of the Goths was complete. The Roman cavalry fled at the first attack; then the infantry were surrounded and cut down by thousands. More than two-thirds of the Roman army perished, and with them perished the Emperor Valens—no one knows just how.

The effects of this defeat were very disastrous for the Romans. Before this time the Goths had been doubtful of their power to defeat the Romans in the open field. Now they felt confidence in themselves, and were ready to try for new victories. And this was not the worst. After the battle of Adrianople the river Danube can no longer be considered the boundary of the Empire. The Goths had gained a footing within the frontier and could wander about at will. Other barbarian nations soon followed their example, and then still others came. As time went on, the Empire fell more and more into the hands of the barbarians.

These effects were not felt so much at first because the new Emperor, Theodosius, was an able man, and wise enough to see that the best way to treat the Goths was to make friends of them. This he did, giving them lands to till, and taking their young men into the pay of his army; so during his reign the Goths were quiet, and even helped him to fight his battles against his Roman enemies. One old chief, who had remained an enemy of the Romans, was received with kindness by Theodosius. After seeing

BREAKING THE FRONTIER

the strength and beauty of the city of Constantinople, he said one day: "This Emperor is doubtless a god upon earth; and whoever lifts a hand against him is guilty of his own blood."

But the wise and vigorous rule of Theodosius was a short one, and came to an end in the year 395. After that the Roman Empire was divided into an Eastern Empire, with its capital at Constantinople, and a Western Empire, with its capital at Rome. After that, too, the friendly treatment of the Goths came to an end, and a jealous and suspicious policy took its place. Moreover, a new ruler, named Alaric, had just been chosen by the Goths. He was a fiery young prince, and was the ablest ruler that the West-Goths ever had. He had served in the Roman armies, and had there learned the Roman manner of making war. He was ambitious, too; and when he saw that the Empire was weakened by division, and by the folly of its rulers, he decided that the time had come for action. So, as an old Gothic writer tells us, "the new King took counsel with his people and they determined to carve out new kingdoms for themselves, rather than, through idleness, to continue the subjects of others."

THE WANDERINGS OF THE WEST-GOTHS

UP to this time the Goths had entered only a little way into the lands of the Empire. Now they were to begin a series of wanderings that took them into Greece, into Italy, into Gaul, and finally into the Spanish peninsula, where they settled down and established a power that lasted for nearly three hundred years.



GOTHS ON THE MARCH

Their leader, Alaric, was wise enough to see that the Goths could not take a city so strongly walled as Constantinople. He turned his people aside from the attack of that place, and marched them to

THE WANDERINGS OF THE WEST-GOTHS

the plunder of the rich provinces that lay to the South. There they came into lands that had long been famous in the history of the world. Their way first led them through Macedonia, whence the great Alexander had set out to conquer the East. At the pass of Thermopylae, more than eight hundred years before, a handful of heroic Greeks had held a vast army at bay for three whole days; but now their feebler descendants dared not attempt to stay the march of Alaric. The city of Athens, beautiful with marble buildings and statuary, fell into the hands of the Goths without a blow. It was forced to pay a heavy ransom, and then was left "like the bleeding and empty skin of a slaughtered victim."

From Athens Alaric led his forces by the isthmus of Corinth into the southern peninsula of Greece. City after city yielded to the conqueror without resistance. Everywhere villages were burned, cattle were driven off, precious vases, statues, gold and silver ornaments were divided among the barbarians, and multitudes of the inhabitants were slain or reduced to slavery.

In all the armies of the Roman Empire, at this time, there was but one general who was a match for Alaric in daring and skill. He too was descended from the sturdy barbarians of the North. His name was Stilicho, and he was now sent by the Emperor of the West to assist the Eastern Emperor. He succeeded in hemming in the Goths, at first, in the rocky valleys of Southern Greece. But the skill and perseverance of Alaric enabled him to get his men out of the trap, while his enemies feasted and danced

in enjoyment of their triumph. Then the Eastern Emperor made Alaric the ruler of one of the provinces of the Empire, and settled his people on the eastern shores of the Adriatic Sea. In this way he hoped that the Goths might again be quieted and the danger turned aside. But Alaric only used the position he had won to gather stores of food, and to manufacture shields, helmets, swords, and spears for his men, in preparation for new adventures.

When all was ready, Alaric again set out, taking with him the entire nation of the West-Goths-men, women, and children-together with all their property and the booty which they had won in Greece. Now their march was to the rich and beautiful lands of Italy, where Alaric hoped to capture Rome itself, and secure the treasures which the Romans had gathered from the ends of the earth. But the time had not yet come for this. Stilicho was again in arms before him in the broad plains of the river Po. From Gaul, from the provinces of the Rhine, from far-off Britain, troops were hurried to the protection of Italy. On every side the Goths were threatened. Their long-haired chiefs, scarred with honorable wounds, began to hesitate; but their fiery young King cried out that he was resolved "to find in Italy either a kingdom or a grave!"

At last while the Goths were piously celebrating the festival of Easter, the army of Stilicho suddenly attacked them. The Goths fought stubbornly; but after a long and bloody battle Alaric was obliged to lead his men from the field, leaving behind them the slaves and the booty which they

THE WANDERINGS OF THE WEST-GOTHS

had won. Even then Alaric did not at once give up his plan of forcing his way to Rome. But his men were discouraged; hunger and disease attacked them; their allies deserted them; and at last the young King was obliged to lead his men back to the province on the Adriatic.

For six years Alaric now awaited his time; while Stilicho, meanwhile, beat back other invaders who sought to come into Italy. But the Western Emperor was foolish, and thought the danger was past. He listened to the enemies of Stilicho, and quarreled with him; and at last he had him put to death. At once Alaric planned a new invasion. Barbarian warriors from all lands, attracted by his fame, flocked to his standard. The friends of Stilicho, also, came to his aid. The new generals in Italy proved to be worthless; and the foolish Emperor shut himself up in fear in his palace in the northern part of the peninsula. Alaric meanwhile did not tarry. On and on he pressed, over the Alps, past the plains of the Po, past the palace of the Emperor, on to the "eternal city" of Rome itself.

In the old days, the Romans had been able to conquer Italy and the civilized world, because they were a brave, sturdy people, with a genius for war and for government. But long centuries of unchecked rule had greatly weakened them. Now they led evil and unhealthy lives. They neither worked for themselves, nor fought in their country's cause. Instead, they spent their days in marble baths, at the gladiatorial fights and wild beast shows of the theaters, and in lounging about the Forum.

In the old days Hannibal had thundered at the gates of Rome in vain; but it was not to be so now with Alaric. Three times in three successive years he advanced to the siege of the city. The first time he blockaded it till the people cried out in their hunger and were forced to eat loathsome food. Still no help came from the Emperor, and when they tried to overawe Alaric with the boast of the numbers of their city, he only replied: "The thicker the hay the easier it is mowed."

When asked what terms he would give them, Alaric demanded as ransom all their gold, silver, and precious goods, together with their slaves who were of barbarian blood. In dismay they asked: "And what then will you leave to us?" "Your lives," he grimly replied.

Alaric, however, was not so hard as his word. On payment of a less ransom than he had at first demanded, he consented to retire. But when the foolish Emperor, secure in his palace in Northern Italy, refused to make peace, Alaric advanced once more upon the doomed city, and again it submitted. This time Alaric set up a mock-Emperor of his own to rule. But in a few months he grew tired of him, and overturned him with as little thought as he had shown in setting him up. As a great historian tells us of this Emperor, he was in turn "promoted, degraded, insulted, restored, again degraded, and again insulted, and finally abandoned to his fate."

In the year 410 A.D., Alaric advanced a third time upon the city. This time the gates of Rome

THE WANDERINGS OF THE WEST-GOTHS

were opened by slaves who hoped to gain freedom through the city's fall. For the first time since the burning of Rome by the Gauls, eight hundred years before, the Romans now saw a foreign foe within their gates—slaying, destroying, plundering, committing endless outrages upon the people and their property. To the Romans it seemed that the end of the world was surely at hand.

At the end of the sixth day Alaric and his Goths came forth from the city, carrying their booty and their captives with them. They now marched into the south of Italy, destroying all who resisted and plundering what took their fancy. In this way they came into the southernmost part. There they began busily preparing to cross over into Sicily, to plunder that fertile province. But this was not to be. In the midst of the preparations, their leader Alaric—"Alaric the Bold," as they loved to call him—suddenly sickened. Soon he grew worse; and after an illness of only a few days, he died, leaving the Goths weakened by the loss of the greatest king they were ever to know.

Alaric's life had been one of the strangest in history; and his burial was equally strange. His followers wished to lay him where no enemy might disturb his grave. To this end they compelled their captives to dig a new channel for a little river near by, and turn aside its waters. Then, in the old bed of the stream, they buried their beloved leader, clad in his richest armor, and mounted upon his favorite war horse. When all was finished, the stream was turned back into its old channel, and the captives

were slain, in order that they might not reveal the place of the burial. And there, to this day, rest the bones of Alaric, the West-Gothic King.

Of the West-Goths after the death of Alaric,



WEST-GOTHIC TOWER

we need say very little. The foolish Emperor of the West remained foolish to the end; but his advisers now saw that something must be done to get rid of the barbarians. The new leader of the Goths, too, was a wise and moderate man. He saw that his people, though they could fight well, and overturn a state, were not yet ready to form a government of their own. "I wish," he said, "not to destroy, but to restore and maintain the prosperity of the Roman Empire." Other

barbarians had meanwhile pressed into the Empire; so it was agreed that the Goths should march into Gaul and Spain, drive out the barbarians who had pushed in there, and rule the land in the name of the Emperor of the West. This they did; and there they established a power which became strong and prosperous, and lasted until new barbarians from the North, and the Moors from Africa, pressed in upon them, and brought, at the same time, their kingdom and their history to an end.