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Then life is to wake, not sleep,
Rise, and not rest, but press
From earth's level, where blindly creep
Things perfected, more or less,
To the Heaven's height, far and steep."

ROBERT BROWNING.

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Chapter 1

**OF ROME IN THE FIFTH CENTURY,
AND HOW THE BARBARIANS CAME TO ITALY**

The great Roman Empire was in its death-throes. Two thousand years had gone to its building; country after country and people after people had bowed before its power and acknowledged its sway. "Eternal Rome" had become the watchword of its citizens, for it seemed to them as if the ancient civilization must endure for ever. Had pagan Rome not proved a thousand times that her strength was invincible, her might unconquerable? How should it ever be otherwise?

The answer was to come from within. She had been unfaithful to the old ideals that had made her strong. Sunk in pride and materialism, she had learnt to live for ease and pleasure alone she had stubbornly refused the faith of Christ and relentlessly persecuted His followers; she would have none of a crucified God. For four hundred years she had striven to overcome the religion that bade men lift their hearts above the things of this world, and with each blow had only made it stronger. But when Christianity at last triumphed, under Constantine the Great, she had fallen too low to understand its message; the seeds of death were already in her heart.

"Why obtrude upon us this notion of sin?" cried the pagan world in the ears of St. Augustine. "What we care about is that wealth should increase. Kings should regard the

obedience of their subjects, not their morality. There cannot be too much of large houses, rich feasts, and revelry by day and by night. Count those for true gods who have provided such gifts for the people.”

A new Rome was to arise on the ruins of the old, a Rome destined to be the stronghold of the Faith that was to regenerate the world; a spiritual Empire that was to extend its bounds far beyond those of pagan Rome in its glory.

At the gates of the Roman Empire lay the barbarians, watching the progress of events and awaiting their chance of conquest. “Invincible” Rome was invincible no longer, and they knew it.

Out of the East, from harrying the Byzantine Empire, came Alaric the Goth, tall of stature, fair and ruddy of face. Successful at first, he soon met his match in Stilicho, the Vandal general of the Emperor Honorius, and retired across the Adriatic. “The Gothic nation has been subdued, never to rise again,” was the proud legend on the arch erected in Rome by Honorius in memory of the event. The writing was still fresh when Alaric returned with a nation behind him. Under the very walls of Rome, where for more than six hundred years no enemy had been seen, he took his stand. Six thousand pounds of gold and thirty thousand of silver was the ransom he asked for the city, while the patricians of invincible Rome hastened to tear down the statues of their gods, and to strip their temples to satisfy his demands. The old lion had indeed lost its teeth, and the hardy Goth was not slow to take advantage of the fact. “Give us land in the North that we may settle,” he asked

imperiously, and on the refusal of Honorius returned in the year 408 to storm and sack the Eternal City. Yet he was not unmerciful, this valiant, barbarian leader, for he ordered his soldiers to spare all who were not in arms, to respect the churches and all who took sanctuary there, and to destroy no public buildings. But a vast host of barbarians, eager for plunder, could not always be controlled, and the sack of Rome had its horrors. Alaric might have been master of Italy if his death, at the age of thirty-five years, had not averted for a little longer the downfall of the Empire.

Of a different stamp was the next invader, Attila the Hun, King of a race of savages so hideous that they were reputed to have sprung from evil spirits. Small, swarthy, and beady-eyed, with the broad face and flat nose of the Tartar, Attila was nevertheless a man of remarkable sagacity and cunning. Defeated at Châlons in Gaul in 451, he turned his attention towards Italy, and for two years cruelly ravaged the northern provinces, penetrating as far as Pavia and Milan. The inhabitants of Venetia, flying from before the face of the terrible conqueror, founded on the coast of the Adriatic the collection of fishing villages which were later to develop into the city and republic of Venice. Valentinian the Emperor, cowering behind the walls of Rome, was awaiting with terror the onward march of Attila's army.

The conqueror was already at Mantua, and the trail of smoking ruins that lay behind him foreshadowed the fate of Rome, when the tottering Empire was saved once more, and by the Head of the Church on earth. At the Emperor's earnest prayer St. Leo the Great, surrounded by only a few

of his priests, went forth to meet the savage barbarian who had made himself the terror of the civilized world. Attila, who had heaped insults on Kings and Emperors, bowed before the humble majesty of the Saint. He retired to the banks of the Danube, where within a year he died.

Twice had the menace sounded; twice had invincible Rome lain at the mercy of the barbarian; twice had the danger been averted. The death-knell of the Empire struck for the third time two years later when Gaiseric the Vandal marched on Rome. Gaiseric, who had conquered the Roman province of Africa fourteen years before, was no valiant warrior of generous instincts, but a crafty and treacherous schemer, who united with the savage nature of the barbarian the worst vices of the corrupt Roman world. Beside him Alaric was a paladin, and the savage Attila an honest man. He was, moreover, a bigoted Arian, and had relentlessly persecuted his Catholic subjects. This "vilest in soul," as he had been called, "of all the barbarian invaders of the Empire," landed in Italy in the year 455, and met with little or no opposition. The Emperor Maximus, his hands still red with the blood of his predecessor Valentinian, showed a craven cowardliness that disgusted even the Romans. Stoning him to death, they cast his body into the Tiber and helplessly awaited their fate. Gaiseric was three days' march from Rome, and no man dared to face him; no man, that is, but one. For the second time the Chief Shepherd interceded for his flock. Advancing without the walls of the city to meet the Vandal host, the Pope exacted from their leader a promise that he would neither slaughter the citizens, torture the captives, nor set fire to the town. For Gaiseric this was no small

concession; but not even St. Leo could prevent the pillage and wholesale destruction wrought by the Vandal hordes. For fourteen days the sack of the city continued, and when at last Gaiseric led his army back to Africa, he carried with him 60,000 captives and the richest treasures of Rome.

The army of Rome, her glory in the days of old, was now no more. It was replaced by a collection of barbarians of many tribes and races, whose loyalty had to be bought with a heavy price, and who knew their own power. They could only be held in check by one of their own race; and, henceforward, at the side of a more or less powerless Emperor stood a barbarian “patrician” as adviser and guide. Twenty years after the sack of Rome by Gaiseric, a boy Emperor, to whom the Romans had given the mocking name of “Augustulus,” sat on the imperial throne. The motley host of barbarians who composed the Roman Army demanded land in payment for their service, and were refused. There was amongst them a brave chief of the name of Odovaker, a man of noble nature. Electing him as their King, the army rose in rebellion. The boy Emperor was deposed, and Odovaker was proclaimed King of Italy.

The choice might have been worse; the Senate, powerless in the face of the difficulty, resolved to make the best of a bad business. Sending ambassadors to Zeno, Emperor of the East, they begged him to unite the Western Empire with his own, and to allow Odovaker, “a mighty man of war,” to govern the Roman population as patrician. To this request Zeno was graciously pleased to agree, and the Empire of the West was virtually at an end. For Odovaker was much more

than a patrician, he was a King, and acknowledged as such by the barbarians, who were all that was left to represent the conquering legions of Rome. The authority of Zeno was but a shadow; it was Odovaker that ruled. He was a wise man, and he governed well; but in his kingdom, too, there was a seed of decay. He depended on the fidelity of an army composed of broken remnants of tribes; he was in no wise the ruler of a nation. When, thirteen years later, there came against him Theodoric, hereditary King of the Ostrogoths, young, brave, and noble, with a nation at his back, Odovaker and his army were hopelessly defeated. Theodoric was proclaimed King of Italy, and for many years ruled well and wisely; but there was no fusion between the conquerors and the conquered. The Goths were looked upon as foreigners in Italy; they were Arians as well as barbarians. What power could blend these hostile races? From whence was to come the new civilization that was to regenerate the world?

Nine years before the coming of Theodoric was born in a little town of Italy a child who was destined to be the leader of a greater army—an army whose watchword was to be Peace, and whose conquests were to be the hearts and souls of men. And to this army was confided the mission of spreading the new civilization amongst the barbarian races—a civilization that was founded on the Faith of Christ. Into all the nations of Europe it was to go forth, and amongst the races that it conquered was our own.

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