LOMBARDS, POPES, AND FRANKS.

Italy and her Invaders. Vols. vii and viii. By T. HODGKIN, D.C.L.
(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899.)

THE two volumes which we now have before us bring Mr. Hodgkin's great work—a labour of twenty years, since its first volume appeared in 1880—to a satisfactory conclusion. He has determined to stop short at the Frankish conquest, which so unhappily linked the history of Italy to that of the 'Holy Roman Empire' for the rest of the Middle Ages. The last of the great barbarian invasions, the Moorish attack in the ninth and tenth centuries—which for a moment set up a sultanate in Apulia and Calabria, and seemed likely to drag southern Italy out of the pale of Christendom—he has resolved to leave untouched, since the valour of Lewis II and Berengar ultimately averted the peril that for thirty years appeared so menacing.

The story of the years 744–774, which is comprised in the first of these two volumes, includes the turning-point in the history of Italy—the crisis which decided that the peninsula was not to settle down into a national kingdom ruled from Pavia (or perhaps from Rome), but was to lose its autonomy and be hopelessly bound up with the good and evil fortune of the house of the Karlings. The ruin of the Lombards starts at the moment of their greatest triumph: in 751 their energetic king Aistulf drove out the Byzantines from Ravenna, and so, unlike his predecessors, was undisputed monarch over the whole of Northern and North-central Italy. In 752 he started out to complete his triumph by the conquest of Rome, where, under the nominal overlordship of Constantinople, the popes had for the last two generations exercised the real sovereign power. Since the Iconoclastic controversy had sundered East and West, the supremacy of the Leo or Constantine who reigned on the Bosphorus was acknowledged by nothing more than the fact that Roman state documents were still dated by his regnal years. Accordingly it was not from his heretical and estranged suzerain that Pope Stephen II sought help against the approaching Lombards, but from Pippin the Frank, who had but just superseded as king the last of the effete Merovingians. All the future woes of Italy come from Stephen's disastrously successful journey to the Frankish court, during which he sought and enlisted the protection of Pippin. Frank and Lombard had been good friends of late years, and Charles Martel had definitely refused to break his alliance with the predecessor of Aistulf in response to a papal summons. But Pippin had a debt to pay to the papacy: he had received its sanction for his usurpation of the Frankish throne, and in return came over the Alps to crush the hosts of Aistulf, to compel him to evacuate his late conquests, and to bestow the cities

lately torn from the Greek on the 'successor of St. Peter.' The Lombard monarchy had still a few years to live, but from the moment when Pippin made his first triumphant descent into the valley of the Po, it was practically moribund. Aistulf and Desiderius, who followed Aistulf upon the throne of Pavia, seem to have been perfectly conscious of the fact: they never once dared to meet the Franks in equal battle on the open plain. They fought by chicane and elusive negotiations; when attacked they tried to hold the Alpine passes, but the moment that these defiles were forced fled again and again, to take shelter behind the strong walls of their capital. Evidently they regarded the idea of standing up to the overwhelming numbers of the Frankish hosts as hopeless. Authari, and other Lombard kings of an earlier generation, had made a far sterner resistance against the Merovingians, when last the western enemy had come over the passes, and the feebleness of Aistulf's defence is rather surprising. It is true that Pippin and Charles the Great were men of a very different calibre from the early Merovingians, and that the armies which they levied and the empire which they ruled were far more formidable. Nevertheless, the Lombards should have made a better fight: Mr. Hodgkin suggests various reasons for their collapse. Aistulf and Desiderius, though not cowards, were both too shifty and intriguing to stand out as heroic figures. 'The 'centrifugal tendency' of Lombard feudalism did much to weaken them; yet we cannot see that the local dukes were a whit less trustworthy in 760 than when Authari had successfully driven back the Franks in 590. The theory that the Lombards had fallen into weakness and effeminacy and 'lost some of their ancient manhood' (vii p. 385), does not seem borne out by the subsequent history of the race. On the whole, the most important factor in their fall was probably their reverence for the Church. Since their conversion to orthodoxy in the previous century the Lombards, kings and people alike, had come very much under the influence of Rome; though the Pope was their inevitable political enemy, he was at the same time their spiritual father. Their history is full of kings and dukes who, like their Anglo-Saxon contemporaries in our own island, resigned their power and took the cowl. They were among the most liberal founders of churches and monasteries in Western Europe, and their laws are full of clauses dealing with religion. In spite of this they were perpetually coming under the papal ban; since the pontiffs had begun to regard themselves as the legitimate heirs of the imperial dominions in Italy, any Lombard advance against imperial territory was treated as an attack on the Church. The hatred of the Lombard race shown by the letters of the eighth-century Popes is almost grotesquely malignant: their pious and orthodox kings are 'unspeakable,' 'devilish,' 'vile,' 'perfidious.' We are ashamed for the

writers when we count up how many times the phrase '*foetidissima gens Langobardorum*' occurs in Roman documents. The papal biographer thinks it becoming to ascribe the death of the wise, virtuous, and patriotic king Liutprand to the fervent prayers of Pope Zacharias. Paul I considered the Lombard such fair game for the most shameless treachery, that he indited at the same moment the two letters printed on pp. 258-9 of vol. vii, while King Desiderius was visiting him at Rome to pay his devotions at the tombs of the Apostles. The first, intended for the eye of Lombard ambassadors, speaks of the king as 'his most excellent, peaceful, and humble son.' The second, destined for the private direction of Pippin the Frank, states that the first is meaningless; 'no heed is to be paid to its contents,' for Desiderius is really 'a shuffling trickster, impious, cruel, and nefarious.' It was not really religious hatred which spoke through the venomous abuse of successive popes, but race-hatred. The Lombards were as orthodox as the Franks, and decidedly better livers; but they were conquering Teutons, detested by the Romans whom they had half subdued. The dread of the day when a Lombard king should sit on the Palatine, and the Lateran should become the second instead of the chief of Roman palaces, was the true cause of the never-ending flow of papal invectives. Pippin and Charles listened to the charmer; they launched their hosts across the Alps; and the one fair chance of unity which Italy had seen since the fall of the Ostrogoths came to an end. For just a thousand years the peninsula had to deplore the success of Pope Stephen's impassioned appeals to the stranger.

Mr. Hodgkin's eighth volume tells how Charles the Great dealt with conquered Italy. On the whole the lot of the Lombards was not so hard as might have been expected. It was an absolute political necessity for him to remove the greater part of the local dukes and to replace them by Franks. But the official nobility suffered far more than any other part of the nation. There was no attempt to thrust Frankish institutions wholesale upon the peninsula. Charles' 'Lombard Capitularies' prove that he was prepared to give Italy special legislation, and by crowning his third son as its king he showed that he intended it to have a certain local autonomy. But he had fatally linked it to the alien realms beyond the Alps, and he had given the papacy the first firm basis for its territorial sovereignty, even though he may not have assented to the preposterous 'Donation of Constantine,' which Pope Hadrian tried to foist upon him. Moreover, he had allowed Leo III to place the imperial diadem on his head, and thereby (to the future ruin of his kindred and his successors) bound up for ever the ideas of the papal assent and the imperial coronation.

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