

CHAPTER XXI

DISORDERS OF

THE EASTERN EMPIRE

In those times the Persians were in a more fortunate situation than the Romans. They had little fear of the peoples of the north,¹ because a part of Mount Taurus between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea separated them from those peoples, and because they guarded a very narrow passage, closed by a gate,² that was the only place through which cavalry could pass. Everywhere else these barbarians had to descend precipices and leave their horses—on which their whole strength depended. But they were further impeded by the Araxes, a deep river flowing from west to east, the crossing places of which could easily be defended.³

Moreover, the Persians were undisturbed on their eastern frontier, while on the south they were bounded by the sea. It was easy for them to keep dissension alive among the Arab princes, whose only thought was to pillage one another. Hence they really had no enemies except the Romans. "We know," said an ambassador from Hormisdas,^{4a} "that the Romans are occupied with many wars, and have to fight against almost all nations. They know, on the other hand, that our only war is with them."

^a This was Hormisdas IV, king of Persia (579-92 A.D.).

To the extent that the Romans had neglected the military art, the Persians had cultivated it. "The Persians," said Belisarius to his soldiers, "do not surpass you in courage; their only advantage over you is discipline."

In negotiations they acquired the same superiority as in war. On the pretext of having to keep a garrison at the Caspian Gates, they demanded a tribute from the Romans—as if every people did not have frontiers to guard. They exacted payment for peace, for truces, for armistices, for the time taken up with negotiations, and for the time they had spent making war.

When the Avars crossed the Danube, the Romans—who were usually occupied against the Persians when they should have been fighting the Avars, and against the Avars when they should have been stopping the Persians—were again forced to submit to a tribute; and the majesty of the empire was tarnished among all nations.

Justin, Tiberius and Maurice worked assiduously to defend the empire. Maurice had virtues, but they were sullied by an avarice unbelievable in a great prince.

The king of the Avars offered to return the prisoners he had taken to Maurice for half a piece of silver each; on his refusal, he had their throats cut. The indignant Roman army rebelled, and since the *greens* were in revolt at the same time, a centurion named Phocas was raised to the throne and had Maurice and his children put to death.

The history of the Greek empire—it is thus that we shall call the Roman empire henceforth—is nothing more than a tissue of revolts, seditions and perfidies. Subjects did not have the slightest idea of the loyalty owed to princes. And the succession of emperors was so interrupted that the title *porphyrogenitus*—that is, born in the rooms where the empresses gave birth—was a distinctive title few princes of the various imperial families could bear.

All paths could lead to imperial power. It was reached

by way of the soldiers, the clergy, the senate, the peasants, the people of Constantinople, and the people of other cities.

After the Christian religion became dominant in the empire, many heresies arose in succession that had to be condemned. When Arius denied the divinity of the Word, the Macedonians that of the Holy Spirit, Nestorius the unity of the person of Jesus Christ, Eutyches his two natures, and the monothelites his two wills, it was necessary to convene councils against them.^b But since the decisions of these councils were not universally accepted at once, several emperors were seduced into returning to the condemned errors. And since no nation has ever had so violent a hatred of heretics as the Greeks, who believed themselves contaminated when they spoke to a heretic or lived with him, many emperors lost the affection of their subjects. And the peoples grew accustomed to thinking that princes—so often rebels against God—could not have been chosen by Providence to govern them.

Because of an opinion based on the idea that the blood of Christians must not be shed—an idea which established itself more and more once the Mohammedans had appeared—crimes not directly involving religion were punished lightly. Officials contented themselves with putting out the eyes, or cutting off the nose or hair, or in some way mutilating those who had incited some revolt or made an attempt on the person of the prince,⁵ so that such actions could be undertaken without danger, and even without courage.

Due to the respect people had for the imperial ornaments, anyone who dared put them on attracted immediate attention. It was a crime to wear purple materials or have them at home, but as soon as a man dressed in them he immediately gained a following, for respect attached more to the apparel than the person.

^b These heresies ranged in time from the fourth to the seventh centuries A.D.

Ambition was further provoked by a strange mania of those times: there was hardly a man of repute who did not have in his possession some prediction promising him the empire.

Diseases of the mind are scarcely ever cured.⁶ Judicial astrology^c and the art of predicting by objects observed in a basin of water had replaced, for Christians, the divination by the entrails of sacrifices or the flight of birds that was abolished with paganism. Vain promises motivated most of the rash undertakings of individuals; just as they became the wisdom guiding the counsel of princes.

With the misfortunes of the empire growing every day, there was a natural inclination to attribute its failures in war and the shameful treaties it endured in times of peace to the misconduct of those who governed.

The revolutions that occurred themselves gave rise to other revolutions, and the effect in turn became the cause. Since the Greeks had seen so many different families come to the throne in succession, they were attached to none of them. And since chance had taken emperors from every walk of life, no birth was so low, or merit so slight, as to be able to extinguish hope.

Many precedents established in a nation form its general spirit, and create its manners, which rule as imperiously as its laws.

Great enterprises, it seems, are more difficult to conduct with us than they were with the ancients. They can hardly be concealed because communications among nations is such today that every prince has ministers in all courts, and can have traitors in all cabinets.

The invention of postal service makes news spread like lightning and arrive from all places.

^c Judicial astrology studied the influence of the heavenly bodies on human destiny, while natural astrology made predictions of what we would now call astronomical phenomena.

Great enterprises cannot be accomplished without money, and merchants have been in control of money since the invention of letters of exchange. For this reason, the affairs of merchants are frequently bound up with the secrets of states, and these men neglect nothing to discover them.

Variations in the exchange rates, without a known cause, lead many people to look for the cause and at last to find it.

The invention of printing, which has put books in everyone's hands; the invention of engraving, which has made geographic maps so common; and, finally, the establishment of newspapers all make men better acquainted with matters of general interest, and this enables them to become informed of secret activities more easily.

Since the invention of postal service, conspiracies in the state have become more difficult because the public has all private secrets in its power.

Princes can act with dispatch because they have in their hands the forces of the state; conspirators must act slowly because they lack all resources. But now that everything is brought to light with more facility and dispatch, conspirators are discovered no matter how little time they lose in making their arrangements.

NOTES

1. The Huns.
2. The Caspian Gates.
3. Procopius, *War of the Persians*, I (10).
4. Menander's *Embassies*.
5. Zeno did much to bring about this slackening of punishments. See Malchus, *Byzantine History*, in *The Extract of Embassies*.
6. See Nicetas, *Life of Andronicus Comnenus* (II, 7).

CHAPTER XXII

WEAKNESS OF

THE EASTERN EMPIRE

In the confusion of things, when Phocas' hold on the throne was insecure, Heraclius came from Africa and had him killed. He found the provinces invaded and the legions destroyed.

Just after he had done something to remedy these evils, the Arabs sallied forth from their country to extend the religion and empire Mohammed had founded with the same hand.

Never was such rapid progress seen. In the first place, they conquered Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and Africa, and invaded Persia.

God did not permit His religion to lose its predominance in so many places because He had abandoned it, but because—whether its condition is one of outward humiliation or glory—it can always produce its natural effect, which is sanctification.

Religion and empires prosper in different ways. A celebrated author^a said that he was quite content to be sick because sickness is a Christian's true condition. Similarly, one could say that the humiliations of the church, its dispersion,

^a See Pascal's *Prière pour demander à Dieu le bon usage des maladies*, 11.

the destruction of its temples, the sufferings of its martyrs are the occasions of its glory, and that when in the eyes of the world it appears to be triumphant, the time of its degradation is usually at hand.

To explain this famous event involving the conquest of so many countries by the Arabs, one need not have recourse to enthusiasm alone. The Saracens had for a long time been distinguished among the auxiliaries of the Romans and Persians; the Osroenians^b and they were the best archers in the world. Alexander Severus and Maximin had engaged them in their service as much as possible, and had used them with great success against the Germans, whom they devastated from afar. Under Valens the Goths could not resist them.¹ In short, they were the best cavalry in the world at that time.

We have said that with the Romans the legions of Europe were better than those of Asia. The opposite held true of their cavalry; I refer to the cavalry of the Parthians, Osroenians and Saracens. And what stopped the conquests of the Romans was that, after the time of Antiochus, a new Tartar people whose cavalry was the best in the world seized upper Asia.

This cavalry was heavy,² while Europe's was light; today it is the opposite. Holland and Friesland were not yet made,³ so to speak, and Germany was full of woods, lakes and marshes, where cavalry was of little use.

After the rivers were changed in their course, these marshes disappeared, and the appearance of Germany altered. The works of Valentinian on the Neckar, and those of the Romans on the Rhine,⁴ brought about many transformations.⁵ And, with the establishment of commerce, regions which previously did not produce horses did so, and they were put to use.⁶

After Constantine, the son of Heraclius, had been poisoned and his son, Constans, killed in Sicily, Constantine the

^b Osroenians: a people in northwestern Mesopotamia.

Bearded, his eldest son, succeeded him.⁷ The notables of the provinces of the East assembled and wanted to crown his two other brothers, maintaining that just as it was necessary to believe in the Trinity, so it was reasonable to have three emperors.

Greek history is full of such features. Once small-mindedness succeeded in forming the nation's character, wisdom took leave of its enterprises, and disorders without cause, as well as revolutions without motive, appeared.

A universal bigotry numbed the spirit and enervated the whole empire. Properly speaking, Constantinople is the only Eastern land where the Christian religion has been dominant. Now the faintheartedness, laziness, and indolence of the nations of Asia blended into religious devotion itself. Among a thousand examples, I need only mention that of Philippicus, Maurice's general, who, on the point of giving battle, began to cry at the thought of the great number of men who were going to be killed.⁸

The tears certain Arabs shed in grief, when their general made a truce which prevented them from spilling the blood of Christians, were another thing entirely.⁹

For a fanatic army and a bigoted army are totally different. We see this in a famous revolution of modern times, when Cromwell's army was like the Arabs', and the armies of Ireland and Scotland like the Greeks'.

A crude superstition, which degrades the mind as much as religion elevates it, made all virtue consist in an ignorant and stupid passion for icons, and caused men to place their entire confidence in them. And generals were known to lift a siege¹⁰ and lose a city¹¹ in order to get a relic.

The Christian religion degenerated under the Greek empire to the point it had reached in our day among the Moscovites, before Czar Peter I regenerated the nation and introduced more changes in the state he governed than conquerors introduce in those they usurp.

It is easy to believe that the Greeks fell into a kind of idolatry. The Italians and Germans of those times cannot be suspected of having been little attached to the externals of worship. However, when the Greek historians refer to the scorn of the Italians for relics and icons, it sounds like the declamations of our controversialists against Calvin. When the Germans passed through on their way to the Holy Land, Nicetas says the Armenians received them as friends because they did not worship icons. Now if, in the view of the Greeks, the Italians and Germans did not have enough such worship, what must have been the enormity of their own?

The East was on the point of witnessing much the same revolution that occurred about two centuries ago in the West, when, with the revival of letters, people began to sense the abuses and irregularities into which they had fallen. And while everyone was seeking a remedy for these evils, men who were bold but insufficiently docile shattered the Church instead of reforming it.

Leo the Isaurian, Constantine Copronymus, and Leo, his son, made war against the icons. And after the empress Irene had reestablished their worship, Leo the Armenian, Michael the Stammerer and Theophilus^c abolished them again. These princes believed they could moderate this worship only by destroying it. They made war on the monks who disturbed the state,¹² and, always using extreme methods, wanted to exterminate them by the sword instead of seeking to regulate them.

Accused of idolatry by the partisans of the new opinions, the monks¹³ threw them off the track by accusing them, in turn, of magic.¹⁴ And showing the people the churches denuded of icons and of all that had previously constituted the object of their veneration, they did not let them imagine that

^c Irene, Leo, etc.: rulers in the eighth and ninth centuries A.D.

such churches could serve any purpose other than sacrificing to devils.

The quarrel about icons was so intense that it eventually became impossible for sensible men to propose a moderate solution, and this was because of its bearing on a very delicate issue—namely, power. For having usurped power, the monks could not increase or maintain it without constantly adding to the externals of worship, of which they themselves formed a part. That is why the wars against icons were always wars against them, and why, when they had won their point, their power knew no bounds.

The same thing then happened that happened again a few centuries later^d in the quarrel Barlaam and Acindynus had with the monks, which tormented the empire until its destruction. A dispute arose as to whether the light that appeared around Christ on Mount Tabor was created or uncreated. The monks could not really care less whether it was one or the other, but since Barlaam was directly attacking them, the light had of necessity to be uncreated.

Because of the war the iconoclastic emperors declared on the monks, the principles of the government were revitalized a little, public revenues were used for the public, and, finally, the fetters were removed from the body of the state.

When I think of the profound ignorance into which the Greek clergy plunged the laity, I cannot keep from making comparisons with those Scythians in Herodotus¹⁵ who put out the eyes of their slaves so that distractions would not keep them from churning milk.

The empress Theodora brought the icons back, and the monks began to abuse public piety again. They went so far as to oppress the secular clergy itself, occupying all the great sees,¹⁶ and gradually excluding all ecclesiastics from the epis-

^d This took place in the fourteenth century.

copacy. That is what made these monks intolerable. If we compare them with the Latin clergy and also compare the conduct of the popes with that of the patriarchs of Constantinople, we see men who were as wise as the others were unintelligent.

Here now is a strange inconsistency of the human mind. The ministers of religion among the early Romans were not excluded from the burdens of evil society and hardly got involved in its affairs. When the Christian religion was established, the ecclesiastics, who were more removed from worldly affairs, concerned themselves with them to a moderate extent. But when, in the decline of the empire, the monks were the only clergy, these men—destined by more particular vows to flee and fear worldly affairs—seized every occasion to take part in them. They never stopped making a stir everywhere and agitating the world they had quitted.

No affairs of state, no peace, no war, no truce, no negotiation, no marriage was arranged except through the monks. The prince's councils were full of them, and the nation's assemblies almost wholly composed of them.

The evil this caused would pass belief. They enfeebled the mind of princes, and made them do even good things imprudently. While Basil employed the warriors of his navy in building a church to Saint Michael, he let the Saracens pillage Sicily and take Syracuse. And Leo, his successor, who employed his fleet for the same purpose, let them occupy Tauromenium^e and the island of Lemnos.¹⁷

Andronicus Palaeologus abandoned his navy on being assured that God was so happy with his zeal for the peace of the Church that his enemies would not dare attack him. The same prince feared that God would demand an account of the time he spent governing his state—time stolen from spiritual affairs.¹⁸

^e Tauromenium: a town in Sicily.

Great talkers, great disputants and natural sophists that they were, the Greeks never stopped embroiling religion in controversies. Since the monks had great prestige at the court, which was even weaker as it grew more corrupt, the monks and the court had the effect of corrupting each other, and the evil was in them both. The result was that the entire attention of the emperors was occupied, sometimes in calming, often in irritating, theological disputes—which have always been observed to become more frivolous as they become more heated.

On seeing the frightful ravages of the Turks in Asia, Michael Palaeologus, whose reign was in such agitation over religious disputes, exclaimed, with a sigh, that the rash zeal of certain persons who had decried his conduct and raised his subjects in revolt against him had forced him to apply all his cares to his own preservation and to neglect the ruin of the provinces. "I rested satisfied," he said, "with providing for these distant parts through governors, who—either because they were won over by money or feared being punished—have concealed the needs of these areas from me."¹⁹

The patriarchs of Constantinople had immense power. During popular tumults the emperors and notables of the state withdrew to the churches, and since the patriarch made the decision to hand them over or not, and exercised this right as he fancied, he proved always, though indirectly, to be the arbiter of all public affairs.

When Andronicus the elder²⁰ made known to the patriarch that he should concern himself with the affairs of the Church and let him govern the empire, the patriarch replied: "It is as if the body said to the soul: I claim to have nothing in common with you, and I have no need at all of your help in performing my functions."

Since such monstrous pretensions were insufferable to the princes, the patriarchs were often driven from their sees. But in a superstitious nation—where all the ecclesiastical

activities of a patriarch thought to be a usurper were held in abomination—this brought about continual schisms, with each patriarch—the old, the new, the newest—having his own votaries.

Quarrels of this sort were far more grievous than those over dogma, because they were like a hydra that a new deposition could always regenerate.

Raging disputes became so natural a condition to the Greeks that when Cantacuzene took Constantinople he found the emperor John and the empress Ann preoccupied with a council against some enemies of the monks.²¹ And when Mohammed I besieged the city, he could not suspend the theological hatreds²² there, and people were more preoccupied with the council of Florence than with the Turkish army.^{23;f}

In ordinary disputes each person knows he can be wrong and hence is not extremely opinionated or obstinate. But in our disputes over religion, by the nature of the thing, each person is sure his opinion is true, and we are indignant with those who obstinately insist on making us change instead of changing themselves.

Readers of Pachymeres' history will easily perceive the inability of theologians, then and always, ever to come to an agreement by themselves. In its pages we see an emperor²⁴ who spends his life calling them together, listening to them, reconciling them, and yet we also see a hydra of disputes that constantly keep arising. And we feel that with the same method, the same patience, the same hopes, the same desire to reach a conclusion, the same simple attitude towards their intrigues, the same respect for their hatreds, they would

^f The union of the Greek and Latin churches, decided upon at the council of Florence (1439 A.D.), was celebrated at Saint Sophia (The Great Church).

never have come to an agreement to the very end of the world.

Here is quite a remarkable example. At the emperor's urging, the partisans of the patriarch Arsenius made an agreement with those of the patriarch Joseph, stipulating that each of the two parties would write its claims on a separate paper; that the two papers would be thrown into a fire; that if one of the two remained whole the judgment of God would be obeyed; and that if both were consumed, they would renounce their differences. The fire destroyed both papers; the two parties united, and for a day there was peace. But the next day they said that the change in their views should have depended on an inner persuasion and not on chance, and the war was resumed more intensely than ever.²⁵ o.k.

One should pay great attention to the disputes of theologians, but as covertly as possible. The trouble one seems to take in pacifying them adds to their prestige; it shows that their thinking is so important that it determines the tranquility of the state and the security of the prince.

One can no more put an end to their involvements by listening to their subtleties than one could abolish duels by establishing schools for refining upon the point of honor.

The Greek emperors had so little prudence that, when the disputes lay dormant, they were insane enough to revive them. Anastasius,²⁶ Justinian,²⁷ Heraclius,²⁸ and Manuel Comnenus²⁹ proposed points of faith to their clergy and people, who would have rejected the truth in their mouths even if they found it there. Thus, always offending in form, and usually in matter, and desirous of displaying a penetration they could well have shown in so many of the other affairs entrusted to them, they undertook vain disputes on the nature of God. But the God who conceals Himself from the learned because of their pride does not reveal himself any the more to the powerful.

It is an error to believe that any human authority exists in the world which is despotic in all respects. There never has been one, and never will be, for the most immense power is always confined in some way. Let the Grand Seignior^a impose a new tax on Constantinople, and a general outcry immediately makes him aware of limits he had not known. A king of Persia can easily compel a son to kill his father, or a father to kill his son;³⁰ but as for making his subjects drink wine, he cannot do it. There exists in each nation a general spirit on which power itself is based, and when it shocks this spirit it strikes against itself and necessarily comes to a standstill.

The most vicious source of all the misfortunes of the Greeks is that they never knew the nature or limits of ecclesiastical and secular power, and this made them fall, on both sides, into continual aberrations.

This great distinction, which is the basis on which the tranquillity of peoples rests, is founded not only on religion but also on reason and nature, which ordain that really separate things—things that can endure only by being separate—should never be confounded.

Although, with the ancient Romans, the clergy did not constitute a separate body, this distinction was as well known to them as to us. Clodius had consecrated Cicero's house to Liberty,^b and when Cicero returned from exile he demanded it back. The pontiffs decided that it could be returned to him without offending against religion if it had been consecrated without an express order of the people. "They declared, "Cicero tells us,^{31:1} "that they had examined only

^a Grand Seignior: a title formerly given to the Sultan of Turkey.

^b Exiling Cicero and seizing his house was part of Clodius' effort to destroy him.

¹ At this point some French editors include in the footnote the Latin quotation from Cicero.

the validity of the consecration, and not the law made by the people; that they had judged the first item as pontiffs, and would judge the second as senators."

NOTES

1. Zosimus, IV (22).
2. See what Zosimus says in I (50) about the cavalry of Aurelian and that of Palmyra. See also Ammianus Marcellinus (XXIV, 6) on the cavalry of the Persians.
3. These were, for the most part, submerged lands artificially made suitable for human habitation.
4. See Ammianus Marcellinus, XXVII (XXVIII, 2).
5. The climate is no longer as cold there as the ancients said it was.
6. Caesar says the horses of the Germans were ungainly and small, IV, 2. And Tacitus, in *The Manners of the Germans* (5), says: *Germania pecorum fecunda, sed pleraque improcera* (Germany is rich in flocks and herds, but most are small in size).
7. Zonaras, *Life of Constantine the Bearded*.
8. Theophylactus, II, 3, *History of the Emperor Maurice*.
9. *History of the Conquest of Syria, Persia and Egypt by the Saracens*, by Ockley.
10. Zonaras, *Life of Romanus Lecapenus*.
11. Nicetas, *Life of John Comnenus*.
12. Long before, Valens had made a law to force them to go to war, and he had all those who disobeyed put to death. Jordanes, *The Succession of Reigns*; and law 26 of *De Decursionibus*, in the Code Justinian (X, title 32).
13. Nothing the reader finds here about the Greek monks reflects on their order itself, for we cannot say a thing is not good just because it has been abused in certain times and places.
14. Leo the Grammarian, *Life of Leo the Armenian*, and *Life of Theophilus*. See Suidas for the article on *Constantine*, son of Leo.

15. IV (2).
16. See Pachymeres, VIII (28).
17. Zonaras and Nicephorus, *Lives of Basil and Leo*.
18. Pachymeres, VII (26).
19. Pachymeres, VI, 29. President Cousin's translation has been used.
20. Paleologus. See the *History of the Two Andronici*, written by Cantacuzene, I, 50.
21. Cantacuzene, III, 99.
22. Ducas, *History of the Last Paleologi* (37).
23. *Ibid.* They were wondering whether they had heard mass from a priest who had consented to the union; they would have avoided him as they would a conflagration, and considered the great church a profane temple. The monk Genadius flung his anathemas at all those desiring peace.
24. Andronic Paleologus.
25. Pachymeres, I.
26. Evagrius, III (30).
27. Procopius, *Secret History* (XI, XIII).
28. Zonaras, *Life of Heraclius* (XIV, 17).
29. Nicetas, *Life of Manuel Comnenus* (VII, 5).
30. See Chardin (*Description of the Political, Civil and Military Government of the Persians*, 2).
31. *Letters to Atticus*, IV (letter 2).

1. REASON FOR THE DURATION OF THE EASTERN EMPIRE

2. ITS DESTRUCTION

After what I have just said about the Greek empire, it is natural to ask how it was able to last so long. I believe I can give the reasons.

After the Arabs had attacked it and conquered some of its provinces, their leaders disputed over the caliphate. And the fire of their early zeal no longer produced anything but civil discords.

After the same Arabs conquered Persia and became divided or weakened there, the Greeks no longer had to keep the principal forces of their empire on the Euphrates.

An architect named Callinicus, who came to Constantinople from Syria, had discovered the composition of a fire that was blown forth from a tube and was such that water and whatever else extinguishes ordinary fires only intensified the blaze. For centuries the Greeks, who made use of it, were in a position to burn all the fleets of their enemies, especially those of the Arabs, who came from Africa or Syria to attack them at Constantinople.

This fire was classified as a state secret. And Constantine Porphyrogenitus, in his book on the administration of

the empire dedicated to his son, Romanus, warns him against giving it away. He tells him that when the barbarians ask for the *Greek fire* he should reply that he is not permitted to give it to them because an angel, who brought it to the emperor Constantine, forbade its transfer to other nations, and that those who had dared to do so had been consumed by the fire of heaven upon entering a church.

Constantinople carried on the greatest and almost the only commerce in the world, at a time when the Gothic nations on one side, and the Arabs on the other, had ruined commerce and industry everywhere else. The making of silk had come over from Persia, and, since the invasion of the Arabs, was badly neglected in Persia itself; besides, the Greeks had control of the sea. This brought immense riches into the state, and consequently, great resources; and as soon as it experienced some respite, public prosperity reappeared at once.

Here is a notable example. Andronicus Comnenus the elder was the Nero of the Greeks, but, with all his vices, he showed an admirable firmness in preventing the injustices and harassments of the great; and it was observed that ¹ several provinces again grew strong during the three years he reigned.

Finally, since the barbarians who lived along the banks of the Danube had settled down, they were no longer so frightening and even served as a barrier against other barbarians.

Thus, while the empire was weighed down by a bad government, particular causes supported it. So today we see some European nations maintaining themselves, in spite of their weakness, by the treasures of the Indies; we see the temporal states of the pope maintaining themselves by the respect in which their sovereign is held, and the corsairs of Barbary by the impediments they present to the commerce of the small nations, which makes them useful to the great ones.²

The Turkish empire is currently about as weak as was

the Greek empire formerly. But it will last a long time, for if any prince whatsoever endangered it in pursuing his conquests, the three commercial powers of Europe know their own interests too well not to go to its defense immediately.³

It is a good thing for them that God has allowed the existence of nations suited for needlessly possessing a great empire.

In the time of Basil Porphyrogenitus, the power of the Arabs was destroyed in Persia. Mohammed, the son of Samrael, who reigned there, called three thousand Turks from the north to serve as auxiliaries.⁴ Because of some disaffection, he sent an army against them, but they put it to flight. Indignant with his soldiers, Mohammed ordered them to pass before him dressed in the frocks of women, but they joined the Turks, who at once proceeded to remove the garrison guarding the bridge over the Araxes and opened the crossing to an innumerable multitude of their compatriots.

After conquering Persia, they spread from east to west over the territories of the empire. And when Romanus Diogenes wanted to stop them, they took him prisoner and subjugated almost everything the Greeks possessed in Asia up to the Bosphorus.

Some time afterwards, in the reign of Alexius Comnenus, the Latins attacked the East. Long before, an unfortunate schism ^a had filled the nations of the two rites with an implacable hatred for each other, and it would have blazed forth sooner if the Italians had stopped thinking of repressing the emperors of Germany, whom they feared, rather than the Greek emperors, whom they merely hated.

It was in these circumstances that a new religious opinion

^a Alexius Comnenus reigned from 1081 to 1118 A.D. The estrangement between the eastern and Roman parts of Christianity had been growing for several centuries, with the formal break occurring in 1054 A.D.

suddenly spread through Europe, to the effect that—since the infidels were profaning the places where Jesus Christ was born or had suffered—a man could efface his sins by taking up arms to drive them out. Europe was full of men who loved war, and who had many crimes to expiate, which it was proposed that they do by following their ruling passion. Everyone therefore took up the cross and arms.

Arriving in the East, the crusaders besieged Nicaea and captured it. They returned it to the Greeks; and, to the consternation of the infidels, Alexius and John Comnenus drove the Turks back to the Euphrates again.

But whatever the advantage the Greeks could gain from the crusaders' expeditions, there was no emperor who failed to shudder at the peril of seeing such proud heroes and great armies pass in succession through the heart of his states.

They sought therefore to make Europe lose its taste for these undertakings, and the crusaders met everywhere with betrayals, perfidy, and all that can be expected from a timorous enemy.

We must admit that the French, who had begun these expeditions, did nothing to make themselves bearable. From the invectives of Andronicus Comnenus^b against us,⁵ we really see that while we were in a foreign nation we failed to restrain ourselves, and that even then we had the defects for which we are reproached today.

A French count was going to seat himself on the emperor's throne. Count Baldwin took him by the arm and said: "You should know that when you are in a country you must follow its customs." "Indeed," he answered, "what a boor this fellow is to sit down here while so many captains are standing!"

^b Jullian points out that the text should read Anna Comnena (instead of Andronicus Comnenus), as it did originally in 1734. Anna was Alexius' daughter.

The Germans, who passed through afterward, and were the nicest sort of people, paid a heavy penalty for our blunders, and everywhere found people in whom we had aroused feelings of revulsion.

Finally, hatred reached fever pitch, and the French and Venetians, led by some bad treatment given Venetian merchants and by ambition, avarice and a false zeal, decided to crusade against the Greeks.

They found them as little inured to war as, in recent times, the Tartars found the Chinese. The French made fun of their effeminate attire, walked the streets of Constantinople dressed in their garish robes, and carried pen and paper in their hands to mock this nation which had renounced the profession of arms.⁷ And after the war they refused to admit any Greek whatsoever into their troops.

They captured the entire western part of the empire, and elected as emperor the Count of Flanders, the remoteness of whose states could not give the Italians any grounds for jealousy. The Greeks maintained themselves in the East, separated from the Turks by the mountains and from the Latins by the sea.

Since the Latins, who had met with no obstacles in pursuing their conquests, met with an infinite number in securing them, the Greeks crossed back from Asia to Europe, retaking Constantinople and nearly the whole West.

But this new empire was only a shadow of the former, and had neither its resources nor its power.

In Asia almost its sole possessions were the provinces west of the Meinder and Sakaria,^c and most of the provinces in Europe were divided into petty sovereignties.

Moreover, during the sixty years that Constantinople remained in the hands of the Latins—with the vanquished

^c Meinder and Sakaria: rivers in western Asia Minor.

dispersed and the victors occupied with war—commerce passed entirely into the control of the Italian cities, and Constantinople was deprived of its riches.

Even its internal commerce was carried on by the Latins. The Greeks, having just reestablished their rule, wished to conciliate the Genoese by according them the freedom to trade without paying duties.⁸ And the Venetians, who did not accept a peace but only some truces, and whom the Greeks did not want to irritate, did not pay duties either.

Before the capture of Constantinople, Manuel Comnenus had permitted the navy to decay, but since commerce still existed it could easily be strengthened again. When the navy was abandoned in the new empire, however, the evil was without remedy because the lack of power constantly increased.

This state, which ruled over many islands, which was divided by the sea and surrounded by it in so many places, had no vessels to navigate it. The provinces no longer had any communication with each other. Their inhabitants were forced to take refuge further inland to avoid pirates, and after doing so they were ordered to withdraw into fortresses to save themselves from the Turks.⁹

The Turks were then waging a peculiar war against the Greeks. They were literally on a manhunt, and sometimes crossed two hundred leagues of country to commit their ravages. Since they were divided under several sultans, one could not, by means of presents, make peace with all, and it was useless to make it with some.¹⁰ They had turned Mohammedan, and zeal for their religion gave them a marvelous commitment to ravaging the lands of Christians. Besides, since they were the ugliest peoples on earth, their women were frightful like themselves,¹¹ and as soon as they had seen Greek women they could no longer bear any others.¹² This led them to continual abductions. Finally, they had at all times been given to brigandage; and it was these same Huns

who had formerly brought so much evil upon the Roman empire.

With the Turks inundating all that remained of the Greek empire in Asia, the inhabitants who could escape fled before them to the Bosphorus. And those who found vessels took refuge in the European part of the empire, which considerably increased the number of its inhabitants. But this number soon diminished. Such raging civil wars broke out that the two factions called in various Turkish sultans on the condition¹³—as extravagant as it was barbarous—that all the inhabitants captured in the regions of the opposing party would be led into slavery. And with a view to ruining their enemies, both concurred in destroying the nation.

After Bajazet^d had subdued all the other sultans, the Turks would have done what they have since done under Mohammed II, had they not themselves been on the point of being exterminated by the Tartars.

I do not have the courage to speak of the calamities which followed. I will only say that, under the last emperors, the empire—reduced to the suburbs of Constantinople—ended like the Rhine, which is no more than a brook when it loses itself in the ocean.

NOTES

1. Nicetas, *Life of Andronicus Comnenus*, II.
2. They disturbed the Italians' navigation in the Mediterranean.
3. Thus the plans against the Turks, such as the one formed under Leo X's pontificate, according to which the emperor was to go to Constantinople through Bosnia, and the king of France through Albania and Greece, while other princes were to embark from their own ports. These plans, I say,

^d Bajazet reigned from 1389 to 1402 A.D.

were not serious, or were undertaken by people who did not see what was in Europe's interest.

4. History written by Nicephorus-Bryennius Caesar, *Lives of Constantine Ducas and Romanus Diogenes*.
5. *History of Alexius*, her father, X, XI.
6. Nicetas, *History of Manuel Comnenus*, I.
7. Nicetas, *History*, After the Capture of Constantinople, 3.
8. Cantacuzene, IV (25).
9. Pachymeres, VII (37).
10. Cantacuzene, III, 96, and Pachymeres, XI, 9.
11. This gave rise to the tradition of the north, related by the Goth Jordanes (XXIV), that Philimer, king of the Goths, found some sorceresses upon entering Getic territory and drove them far from his army. They wandered in the wilderness, where nightmarish demons mated with them, thus spawning the nation of the Huns. *Genus ferocissimum, quod fuit primum inter paludes, minutum, tetrum atque exile, nec alia voce notum, nisi quae humani sermonis imaginem assignabat* (a most savage race, which first lived in the marshes, small, ugly, and skinny, and marked by no other utterance than one which gave them a semblance of human speech).
12. Michael Ducas, *History of John Manuel, John and Constantine*, 9. At the beginning of his *Extract of Embassies*, Constantine Porphyrogenitus warns that when the barbarians come to Constantinople, the Romans should keep from showing them the greatness of their wealth and the beauty of their women.
13. See note 11 above.
14. See the *History of the Emperors John Paleologus and John Cantacuzene*, written by Cantacuzene (III, 81, 96).

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