

THE EMPEROR FREDERICK II. OF THE HOUSE OF HOHENSTAUFEN.

BY THE REV. ARTHUR ROBERT PENNINGTON, M.A., F.R. Hist. Soc.,
Canon of Lincoln Cathedral.

THE Emperor Frederick II. was one of the most extraordinary personages in history. He has found many biographers among Continental writers. Muratori, Giannone, Von Raumer, and Hofler have described his remarkable career either with national pride or with stern condemnation. But until Dean Milman wrote his history of Latin Christianity, a few lines in Gibbon and a few pages of Hallam contained all the information which could be obtained respecting him by the English reader. Since the Dean wrote, information from other sources has been obtained, which I now propose to bring before you. We see this remarkable man only indistinctly through the mists of calumny and prejudice. On account of his long contest with the popes, he has been assailed by Roman Catholic writers with vituperative epithets. I propose in the following paper to give an account of his life; to show whether or no Roman Catholic writers were justified in regarding him as a monster of iniquity; to describe his natural endowments and acquirements, and the services which he conferred on his country; and to bring before you that celebrated struggle with the popes which has affected the course of events in his own age, and through succeeding generations.

On a conical hill in Suabia, not far from Stuttgart, stand the ruins of an old castle. It was the cradle and home of the House of Hohenstaufen, who derived their name from

the hill Staufen, on which it is situated. The wanderer through that scene of desolation, where once were heard the rude laugh and boisterous mirth of assembled warriors and revellers, will dwell with feelings of melancholy on the instability of human greatness; for the name which was once borne abroad through Europe on the trumpet-blast of fame has been many centuries ago blotted out from under heaven. That castle was built in the eleventh century by the founder of the family, Frederick von Buren. At first he was only a valiant knight, who derived his name from the hamlet subject to his rule. He ingratiated himself with the Emperor Henry IV., the celebrated antagonist of Pope Gregory VII., who humbled himself before him at Canossa. The former, in recognition of his services, gave him the hand of his daughter Agnes, and for a dowry the dukedom of Suabia. His grandson Conrad, whose claims as successor to his uncle Henry V. had been at first set aside, was afterwards, with the full consent of the Pope, elevated to the Imperial dignity.

Conrad was succeeded by his nephew, Frederick Barbarossa, the national hero of Germany, the most illustrious on the roll of her chivalry, whose exploits the poets have embalmed with their praises. Now it must be remembered that the election by the German Diet gave the Emperor the kingdom of Italy as well as Germany. At first, the Pope was the lawful subject of the Emperor. But the secret of the Pope's strength was to be found in the fact that the coronation of the latter in Rome by the Pope was considered as indispensable to the assumption of the Imperial title. It was maintained, therefore, that he alone could impose conditions on the Emperor, and that, as the chief function of the Emperor was to defend the Pope, it was the duty of the latter to see that he was properly qualified for the Imperial dignity, and to depose him if he did not rightly discharge his duties. For many years before the reign of Frederick Barbarossa, no pontiff had thought of waiting for the confirmation of the Emperor. On the contrary, it was pretended that the Emperor ought to be confirmed by the Pope. The struggle of twenty years between rival candidates for the

Papacy in Frederick's reign was only an effort on the part of the monarch to recover his supremacy over the priesthood. He set up pope after pope against the real Pope Alexander III. In all probability he would have been successful if he had not been engaged in hostilities with the cities of Lombardy. Alexander was obliged for many years to seek refuge in France, and even in Italy he could not maintain himself against the factions of Rome. Lombardy groaned beneath the yoke of despotism. At length all the cities, including those whose private animosities had led them to assist the German conqueror, resenting the imposition of taxes which, not having been for a long time paid, were obsolete, formed a league against the oppressor. That league was hallowed by the Pope, because he saw that by giving employment to his arms, it would aid him in his designs against Frederick. After several years of warfare, on the field of Legnano, the standard of the Empire fell before the standard of Milan. The German host, when flushed with victory, had previously been annihilated by fever within the walls of Rome. The popes set up against Alexander, during this period, had generally ceased to be respected. Frederick, humbled by his disasters, was induced at last not only to give freedom to the Lombard cities, but also to meet his adversary the Pope, Alexander III., at Venice in 1177. Three slabs of red marble, in the porch of St. Mark's, Venice, indicate the spot where Frederick knelt in pious awe before the Pope, who raised him with tears of joy, and gave him the kiss of peace. A painting in the wall of the Ducal Palace has given currency to a legend which the poet has described, that—

‘In the temple porch
Did Barbarossa fling his mantle off
And kneeling, on his neck received the foot
Of the proud pontiff.’¹

The scene needed not this fact to give it full significance. For it marked the second defeat of the secular power in a contest which it could not repeat under more favourable cir-

¹ Rogers's *Italy*, p. 67.

cumstances ; the final abandonment, by the mightiest prince of his time, of an enterprise which had for its object to compel the Pope once more to acknowledge his supremacy.

The Emperor Frederick Barbarossa was succeeded by his son Henry VI., who became dangerous to the popes through his marriage with Constance, the heiress of Sicily and Naples, for he could through the possession of those territories threaten them on either side of Rome. Little did Barbarossa see, at the time of the rejoicings for this marriage, that it would be the ultimate cause of the ruin of his dynasty. But the popes, as we shall see directly, were delivered from the danger with which they were threatened. A sudden death overtook the monarch when he had ascended to the pinnacle of worldly glory, for the possession of Sicily was regarded as a stepping-stone to the conquest of the Greek Empire. What a change had taken place in the course of a few short months ! In the autumn he could compel the feeble old Pope Celestine to submit to his pleasure. In the spring of the following year, a child of three years of age, the son of Henry, the subject of this paper, was the rightful heir of the Empire ; and the greatest of the popes, Innocent III., ascended the chair of St. Peter.

The birth of Frederick was celebrated in strains suitable only to the coming of the Messiah. He was to be a sun without a cloud, which was never to suffer an eclipse. In his reign the wilderness was to rejoice and blossom as the rose. A story is told of him in his childhood which was afterwards considered as a prognostication of his future career of opposition to the Papacy. He was heard to exclaim in his sleep, 'I cannot, I cannot.' When inquiry was made after he woke as to the cause of this exclamation, he said that he seemed to be swallowing all the bells in the world, but that there was one which he could not swallow. In truth he found, as we shall see, the Papacy to be too tough a morsel for him. The Electors, with the full sanction of the Pope, deliberately broke the solemn promise which they had made to his father, that they would raise him to the throne of the Empire. They could not, however, deprive him of his lawful inheritance, the

kingdom of Naples and Sicily. A council of Regency, after the death of his mother, superintended the affairs of his kingdom. His youth was passed in a gorgeous palace, to which the poets represented the nations of the earth as bringing the richest offerings. Musselmen instructors superintended his education. His inheritance was, however, a prey to internal discord, and was ravaged by the armies of the invaders. Nobles and prelates, Christians and Saracens, French and Germans, seemed to vie with one another in ravaging Sicily and Apulia. He would soon have been despoiled of it if Pope Innocent III., whom his mother had appointed his guardian, had not supplied him with soldiers, and hurled his anathemas against his foes. Well might Frederick make this appeal to his royal brethren: 'To all the kings of the earth, the innocent boy, Frederick, King of Sicily, addresses himself. Assemble yourselves, ye nations; muster hither, and see if any sorrow be like unto my sorrow. My parents died before I could know their caresses. I, the offspring of so august a union, was handed over to servants of all sorts, who presumed to draw lots for my garments and for my royal person. Germans, Tuscans, Sicilians, barbarians, conspire to worry me. My daily bread, drink, and freedom are all measured out to me in scanty proportions. No king am I: I am ruled instead of ruling; I beg favours instead of granting them. Again and again, I beseech you, O ye princes of the earth, to aid me to withstand slaves, to set free the son of Cæsar!'

But he was now to be called to a higher sphere. Otho, the candidate for the Empire, favoured by the Pope, who had undisputed possession of it by the assassination of his rival, had incurred the anger of Innocent by invading the patrimony of the Church and the kingdom of Naples. The Electors, taking advantage of the excommunication of Otho in consequence of that invasion, determined to transfer the kingdom from Otho, who had made himself very unpopular in Germany, to the representative of the old Hohenstaufen dynasty. They stated in their address that they were moved to make him the offer by the report of those endowments and virtues which,

even at that early age, had made his name illustrious. Innocent, blinded by anger, consented to the transfer, thus exposing the Papacy to the very danger arising from the union of the kingdom of Naples and Sicily with the Holy Roman Empire from which he seemed to have been delivered on the death of Henry VI. The consequences were a desperate war between the Papacy and the Empire, in which the former was nearly deprived of her dominion, excommunications, battles, massacres, the rooting out of the House of Hohenstaufen, the weakening of the Holy Roman Empire, and the division of Germany into a number of independent principalities which have been a source of weakness to the country through many successive generations.

We see then that at this time the Emperor had begun to exhibit that love of learning and those abilities which had caused him to stand out prominently from the common herd of his fellow-countrymen. The handsome forehead, the countenance beaming with intelligence, as they appear on his coins, seem to indicate the possession of intellectual powers of the highest order, which made him pre-eminently the wonder of his age. His contemporaries attributed them to the arts of the astrologers and necromancers in whose company he delighted. We have evidence that he was most anxious to cultivate them, and that he encouraged others to follow his example. In 1232 he sent to the renowned University of Bologna translations into Latin of Aristotle's works on logic and mathematics, with the following letter :—

'We have always loved knowledge from our youth ; whatever time we can steal from state affairs we cheerfully dedicate to reading the many works stored in our library. We have stripped the works written by the Greek and Arabic philosophers of their old garb ; we have had them translated by chosen men, maintaining faithfully the virginity of the words. We do not wish to keep all these to ourselves ; you are the first to whom we send them, since you are the illustrious nurslings of philosophy, who skilfully draw new waters out of the old cisterns. Do you make them public for the use of students, to the glory of your friend Cæsar.'

He had also established a university at Naples. Masters and scholars were all alike invited to a rich banquet. Riches and honours would be showered upon distinguished students.

‘We keep the students,’ he says, ‘within view of their parents ; we save them many toils and long foreign journeys ; we protect them from robbers ; they used to be pillaged while travelling abroad ; they may now study with small cost and short wayfaring, thanks to our liberality.’

This university, if it had continued to flourish, would have hastened on the glorious era of Italian art and literature. Men of genius from all countries were invited to take up their abode at his court. Two of them could give instruction in arithmetic, Euclid, and algebra. A treatise by one of them on square numbers, dedicated to him, has only lately been discovered. Medical science was most carefully cultivated in his dominions. No one was allowed to give lectures on medicine except at Naples and Salerno. No one could practise medicine who could not produce testimonials from the board established in those cities, or without five years’ study of medicine. An oath was required from all druggists to take heed in compounding medicines.

To Frederick also belongs the merit of having encouraged the development of the Italian language. We have the testimony of Dante to this effect in his treatise ‘di Volgare Eloquenza.’ ‘When we contemplate the pains bestowed upon the land of Sicily we must blush for our princes, who, leaving the track of heroes, follow in the footsteps of the ordinary rabble ; but Frederick and his noble son Manfred gave proof of their nobility and superiority of mind by following pursuits worthy of men, and by disdaining such as were fit only for the brute creation, whence men of high aspirations, and gifted with noble minds, endeavour to follow the example of the majesty of such great princes. Whereupon it happened that all Italian compositions of any merit emanated from the court of these exalted monarchs ; and as the seat of their royalty was in Sicily, whatever was composed by our ances-

tors was termed Sicilian, which denomination is retained even now; and it is not in the power of ourselves or of our descendants to alter that appellation.' In fact, at one time it seemed as if Palermo and not Florence would be the cradle of the sweet Italian tongue. The region which Frederick governed was, indeed, consecrated by poetry and song. In Sicily Theocritus had sung the delights of a life passed by shepherds and shepherdesses with their lowing herds and bleating flocks, amid flowery meadows and near warbling groves; and on Naples looked down the tomb of Virgil, the immortal bard of Mantua. The Emperor Frederick was a poet who could not only celebrate the charms of his sovereign lady, 'the flower of all flowers, the rose of May,' but could also exhibit his appreciation for the beauties of nature—for the lake, sleeping like a crystal mirror in the bosom of the mountains, the golden cornfields, the gardens of roses, and the glorious landscapes of his beloved Italy. His sons, Edward and Manfred, have bequeathed to us poems in the Italian language. His secretary, Pier de Vigne, has left us the earliest specimen of the Italian sonnet. He himself could speak all the languages spoken by his subjects, not only Italian, but Greek, Latin, German, French, and Arabic. If he had lived, the study of the Greek language might have taken place before the capture of Constantinople. The fragrant flowers of Hymettus might have been seen in those days blooming in the bowers which adorned the banks of the Tiber and the Arno.

Frederick also delighted in sculpture, painting, and architecture. We are informed that palaces rose in various parts of his kingdom remarkable for their elaborate adornment and the chaste beauty of their architecture, adorned with mosaics and marbles of different colours, enriched, too, with sculptures, as well as with paintings by the hands of the most eminent masters. In fact, it was evident that learning and art were basking beneath the smiles of a patron such as had never appeared in the world since the days of Alfred and Charlemagne. Under his fostering influence every branch of learning was starting into life after the slumber of ages.

Frederick's age can only be compared to that glorious era of the Renaissance, when the sun of learning, no longer shorn of his beams, poured a flood of light over the dark places of Europe.

Frederick was not only distinguished for his love of polite literature, but also for his ardour in the pursuit of scientific knowledge. He was himself an author on medical subjects. He was a great patron of natural history. He used his friendly relations with eastern kings to form a collection of animals not often seen in Europe—the elephant, camel, giraffe, and camelopard. He also wrote a treatise on Hawking, which is still cited with respect. He classifies birds, and treats generally of their habits, describing, in particular, a white cockatoo sent to him by the Sultan of Cairo. He goes on to treat of their various methods of flying, fighting, and moulting. He describes the nests, incubation, migration, and plumage of hawks. Painting has perpetuated his connection with this sport. In the great hall at Frankfort, adorned with the portraits of all the German Cæsars, Frederick is represented with a hawk on his wrist.

But poetry and science were very far from occupying all the thoughts of this distinguished monarch. His great concern was the internal regulation of the kingdom committed to his charge. His code in Sicily and Naples was framed with the special view of securing equal rights to all classes of his subjects, and of delivering them from the yoke of the feudal oppressor. He stripped the nobles and prelates of their jurisdiction in criminal cases. He also decreed that any count or baron, carrying on war on his own account, should lose his head and his goods. These were amazing strides in the right direction, but the former was quite unprecedented in feudal kingdoms. Many justiciaries were appointed throughout the kingdom. No one might hold this office without the authorisation of the crown. He strove to make his officials as righteous as he was himself. He himself came before his courts. So great was his love of justice, that he would rather lose his cause than win it if he were in the wrong. No

advocates were allowed to practise without an examination by the judicial bench. They were obliged to take an oath that they would allege nothing against their conscience. The court furnished widows, orphans, and the poor with champions free of expense. The law, by which it was guided, endeavoured to secure an even-handed administration of justice. For instance, any shopman detected in stretching the cloth which he sold beyond the fair measurement, or using false weights and measures, was liable to a heavy penalty, and was whipped through the town. He found that the poor were often robbed of their crops and vines by the rapacity of the wealthy. He decreed that a male transgressor must undergo imprisonment. Less mercy was, however, shown to the female attendant, who, secure of her master's protection, had plucked the fruit of the vine-dressers. She was to be flogged round the town, whatever might be the rank of her lord.

In the government of the country the principle on which he acted was that the glory of the ruler was the happiness and prosperity of his subjects. At one time, when he needed every ounce of gold for public purposes, he blamed his ministers for raising the tariffs. Even Pope Clement, the great enemy of the House of Hohenstaufen, was obliged to bear an unwilling testimony to the statesman-like qualities of its greatest ornament. When Charles of Anjou, who had despoiled it of its inheritance, complained of the poverty of its resources, he said to him :—' Who can pity the poverty of which you complain, when you have not the ability or the sense to live on the resources of the realm in which the noble Frederick, who had greater expenses than you, was able to enrich both himself and his subjects enormously, and besides to replenish Lombardy, Tuscany, the Two Marches, and Germany?' The same enlightened regard for the welfare of the community led him to direct each town in his kingdom to send two deputies to an assembly appointed to meet at Foggia, not for the purpose of voting the supplies, for Frederick had previously fixed the amount, but for the

purpose of regulating the ways and means of raising them. It is possible that we in England are greatly indebted to him. Earl Simon de Montfort, about thirty years after the time just referred to, summoned the merchant and the trader to sit beside the knight of the shire, the baron, and the bishop, in the Parliament of the realm. We know that Earl Simon had visited the Imperial Court, and was acquainted with the legislation of Frederick. All his efforts to introduce similar improvements into Northern Italy failed through the opposition of the Pope and the independent spirit of the municipalities. Six hundred years of tyranny and foreign oppression must pass away before this part of Italy could obtain the blessing of a mild and paternal government under the House of Savoy. The system established in Sicily proved indeed like Jonah's gourd, which sprang up in a night and withered in a night. The golden age of Sicily was the reign of Frederick II. The truth is, that his marvellous powers were wasted on an age not ripe for them. Soon after his death, tyranny reigned uncontrolled through the country. Strange as it may seem to an Englishman, the history of Sicily has been one of retrogression. Neapolitan writers, not very far removed from the times in which we live, Giannone, Colenta, Galanti, and Amari, look back with a sigh to the good old days of the illustrious Hohenstaufen King.

But we must now speak of his terrible struggle with the Papacy. The aggressive designs of the Popes were undoubtedly the cause of the undying enmity with which they pursued this illustrious and unfortunate monarch. The emperors were willing to acknowledge the supremacy of the Popes in the spiritual department, but they would endure no superior as temporal rulers. The Popes, on the other hand, wished to reign supreme in both departments. Frederick aspired to a supremacy altogether irreconcilable with that of the supreme pontiff. The inheritance of the kingdom of Naples and Sicily, already referred to, was one cause of the animosity with which he was pursued by the popes ; for it was regarded as a fief of the Holy See, and,

by his possession of it, he could threaten the Pope, as we have seen, on the south as well as the north.

Frederick's misfortune was that he had given Gregory IX. (a man of vast learning, indomitable resolution, amazing energy, and unbounded ambition, who, at the age of eighty, became Pope in 1227) a hold upon him of which he did not fail to make use for the advancement of his own pretensions. In a moment of that youthful enthusiasm which he had inherited from his grandfather Barbarossa, he had made a vow at San Germano, in July 1225, under pain of a sentence of excommunication if he neglected to fulfil it, that he would in two years, in August 1227, engage in a Crusade for the recovery of the Holy Places from the infidel. The wars in his dominions had hitherto prevented him from rushing, with his gallant hosts, like a mighty torrent, upon the plains of Asia. Doubtless he intended to fulfil his vow ; but he thought that he might postpone his departure till he could go without hazard.

He sailed before the day appointed, but was obliged by illness to return. Gregory immediately attacked him in a style of passionate invective in which truth was artfully blended with falsehood ; accused him of having returned because he preferred the luxurious ease of his kingdom to the hardships of the Crusade ; and concluded by fulminating against him, in 1227, the sentence of excommunication, which was renewed twice in the same year, while the bells were tolled, and the priests around him extinguished their torches.¹ Frederick addressed a manifesto to the Sovereigns of Europe in a style equally acrimonious, in which he called on them to unite with him against one who was exerting every effort to cast around them the chains of the oppressor.² On March 23, 1228, he was again excommunicated, and his kingdom was placed under an interdict.

Frederick soon afterwards sailed for the Holy Land in June or July 1228, but he was followed by Gregory with ban

¹ Matthew Paris, pp. 431-4, 461-7, an. 1228, N. 1-4.

² Matthew Paris, sub an. 1228, written at the end of 1227, December 6.

and anathema because he had not given satisfaction to the Church before his departure.¹ When he had been for a short time in Palestine, a vessel arrived with the intelligence that a Papal army had broken into Apulia, and was ravaging that country. As he was not fired with the ambition of Cœur de Lion, who would not have been satisfied unless he had performed prodigies of valour, and had hewn for himself a way to the Holy Sepulchre through the hosts confederate against him, and as he was anxious to return for the defence of his patrimony against the great enemy of his race, he determined to secure by negotiation what he had not obtained by force of arms, and concluded a by no means inglorious treaty with the Sultan for the surrender of Jerusalem. His rapid return in July 1229 disconcerted the hostile measures of the Pope against his territory. The latter, on hearing of the treaty, became more determined in his hostility to Frederick. When it might have been supposed that age would have chilled his ardour, and that he would have abstained from passionate language, he issued a still fiercer excommunication than before, and called on the princes and potentates of Europe to arise in their wrath, and to aid him in sweeping from his path the contumacious Emperor who defied his authority. They had not, however, much difficulty in discovering the malevolent spirit which dictated this opposition; and were convinced that Frederick ought to have been honoured by the Pope because he had obtained for pilgrims the privilege of access to the Holy Sepulchre. As for these reasons they were unwilling to range themselves on his side, the Pope was obliged to absolve him without any satisfaction for his special sin, and thus to admit the injustice of his former sentence of excommunication.² Frederick, however, by consenting, though a conqueror, to the restoration of the places which he occupied in the Papal territories, and to other terms disadvantageous to himself, showed that he could not shake off that

¹ Jordanus, in Raynald. sub anno.

² Matthew Paris, pp. 469, 470, 472, 476-86, 490. Raynaldus, an. 1229, N. 42-3.

awe of the Papacy which lay like a leaden weight on the minds of the inhabitants of Europe.

A hollow truce of nine years, from 1230 to 1239, between the Pope and the Emperor was succeeded by a still more deadly conflict. The Pope had strengthened his cause by allying himself with the Lombard republics, and by coming forward as their champion against the Emperor who sought, like his grandfather, to deprive them of that liberty which was their inalienable birthright. Frederick now availed himself of the opportunity of attacking them afforded to him by their support of his son in his unnatural rebellion against him.¹ After a great victory at Cortenuova, in 1237, several of the Lombard cities threw open their gates to the conqueror. Milan, Brescia, Piacenza, and Bologna alone bade defiance to him; but without aid they would soon bow their necks beneath his yoke. The probability was that all Italy would soon be prostrate at the feet of the conqueror. The Pope would in this case become a vassal of the Empire.² The danger was no common one. All grand visions of Empire would have vanished away. Frederick would have reigned supreme over the souls and bodies of his subjects. The banner of the Papacy would have been lowered, and would have been replaced by the eagle of the Hohenstaufen. The heads of the various Churches of Christendom would not have obeyed the mandates of one who had become a vassal of the Empire. Foreign princes would have cast off their allegiance to him. The Papal system would have come to an end before the appointed time.

The Pope saw his danger, and determined to exert every effort to preserve his high place among the nations. He at once made alliance with Venice, took the Lombard republics under his protection, and entered into mortal combat with the Empire. It was not difficult to discover a pretext for commencing hostilities. Again, on March 24, 1239, the thunderstorm of excommunication and interdict burst over

¹ Muratori, xvi. 624.

² Matthew Paris, pp. 574, 579-81, 599, 609, 651-3.

the head of Frederick. Again, in reply to an address of the latter to the Princes of Christendom, in which he arraigned the base conduct of the Pope, he delivered a more passionate declamation than those which he had formerly published against him. It was full of calumnious charges, and showed the Pope to be wanting in the true spirit of Christianity. He rises in it from one bold invective to another, and uses more and more of the language of reproach and defiance. The princes and potentates of Europe were unwilling to range themselves on his side. Many of them saw that the Pope ought to have honoured the Emperor for his signal services in Palestine; that he had not, like the Pope, oppressed Christendom with his exactions; and that the fierce invectives of the latter were dictated by inexorable hatred, and by the determination not to submit to his supremacy.¹ Gregory, however, though supported only by the arms of the free cities, and by the mercenary troops paid with the money which Henry III. of England, that weak tool of the Papacy, in spite of the strong remonstrances of the nobles and clergy, allowed him to collect in England for the so-called Holy War,² confronted with an undaunted mien his powerful adversary. He excited the vehement anger of the princes of Germany and of the King of France by his effrontery in deposing Frederick, and in making an offer of the Imperial Crown to Robert, the brother of the latter, which he indignantly refused. But his feeble forces were unable to cope with the powerful legions of the Emperor. Town after town in his territories was wrested from him. Once the awe of the Papacy, which Frederick could not always shake off, caused him to forego an important advantage, and prevented him from finishing the war by the capture of Rome. But Frederick determined not again to abandon the certain prospect of a glorious triumph over his foe. The Pope, however, still bore up against him with undaunted courage. He

¹ Matthew Paris, writing in his *Monastery of St. Albans*, sub anno 1239, expresses these views.

² Matthew Paris, sub ann. 1240.

sought to surround himself with spiritual terrors, and summoned a General Council. Frederick prevented it from being held by seizing the vessels conveying several of the prelates to it, and committing them to prison.¹ The raging lion stood at bay in a circle which, as his foes pressed on, became continually narrower. The capture of the city seemed inevitable. The Pope, however, was spared this humiliation. At the age of nearly 100, when he ought to have been preparing himself by spiritual exercises for his final change, his spirit passed away with the words of defiance and hatred on his lips, just after he had seen the camp-fires of the marauders, who were about to be let loose for pillage and massacre, within the walls of the Eternal City.

Frederick had now gained a glorious victory over the Papacy. The sun of the Empire shone forth with unclouded majesty. He had previously, in the year 1235, displayed his might in Germany. At the renowned Diet of Mayence, summoned in 1235 for the purpose of completing the pacification of Germany, after having subdued the rebellion of his son, he appeared as the most powerful monarch who had ever swayed the sceptre of the Holy Roman Empire. He was surrounded by princes and prelates who revered him, not only on account of his personal qualities, but also because the glory of Fatherland seemed to be bound up with the glory of the House of Hohenstaufen. He had also gained fame by the glorious victory at Cortenuova. The nations of Europe little thought at this time that the sun would be soon shorn of its beams, and that before another generation had passed away the glory of the House of Hohenstaufen would be extinguished for ever.

The death of Gregory in 1241 was followed by the election of Celestine IV., who died a month afterwards. Sinibald Fiesco, of a house in Genoa, who, having been elected in June 1243, after the Pontifical chair had been vacant for two years, assumed the title of Innocent IV., proved a far more formidable opponent to Frederick than his predecessor.

¹ Matthew Paris, sub ann. 1241.

The Emperor, in consequence of the advantages which he had gained in his combat with Gregory, seemed able to extort from the Pope the repeal of the sentence of excommunication. Negotiations were soon begun with a view to this object. The conditions of reconciliation between the contending parties which were proposed and at length sworn to by the Imperial ambassadors on March 31, 1244, in the name of the Emperor, though they involved an acknowledgment of the undoubted rights of the Empire, were found, on examination, to be so disadvantageous to him, inasmuch as he was required to surrender his fortresses, and to abandon all the advantages which he had gained in his conflict with the Papacy, that he soon began to shrink back from the fulfilment of them.¹ Innocent, feeling that he was in the power of the Emperor, fled in disguise to Civita Vecchia, where, embarking on board a galley, one of the fleet of twenty-three galleys which were waiting there for him, he fled first to Genoa and afterwards to Lyons. He knew that in this last city he could act as an independent potentate. When he was safe from the vengeance of the Emperor he was guilty of an unwarrantable assumption of authority; 'to the astonishment and horror of all who heard him,' in 1245 he deposed Frederick in a full council of the Church, and absolved his subjects from their allegiance.² Frederick had no sooner heard of this display of Papal arrogance than, bursting with wrath, he re-crowned himself with his own hand in the presence of a full court,³ and published a manifesto to the nations of Europe, in which he denounced in the strongest terms his tyranny and injustice.⁴ The Pope, breathing equal fury, called on the subjects of the Emperor to revolt from their monarch. But the incantation of the mighty magician had not yet displayed its subtle power. Innocent, after several ineffectual attempts to raise up a rival sovereign in Germany, found an emperor in the person of Henry of

¹ See Matthew Paris, sub ann. 1244.

² *Ibid.* pp. 886-7, 896, 920. See also Giannone, *Stor. di Napoli*, lib. xvii. cap. 3.

³ Matthew Paris, pp. 753-756, 928.

⁴ Peter de Vine, lib. i. 3.

Thuringia. The gold of England, and the sermons of the prelates and clergy who preached the crusade against Frederick, raised for him a large army. But the forces of Frederick inflicted on him a crushing defeat, after which he died of shame and vexation. The Pope again endeavoured in vain 'to thrust greatness' on several princes, but at length succeeded in inducing William of Holland to accept the imperial dignity. The leading princes were very indignant with the Pope for deposing an Emperor of Germany.

But now dark clouds began to gather over the ill-fated monarch. The defeat which he sustained before Parma on February 18, 1248, when his outworks were destroyed, and the imperial crown, with a large amount of treasure, fell into the hands of the victors¹—the fate which had befallen his beloved son Enzo, remarkable for his personal beauty, his bravery, his skill in war, his love of music and poetry, who, after having fought valiantly against his father's foes, was taken prisoner and consigned to perpetual imprisonment at Bologna—the treachery of his bosom friend and counsellor, Peter de Vinea, whom he detected, as he imagined, in a design of carrying him off by poison,² wrung his heart with anguish and paralysed his energies. Now, in a strange state of irresolution, he would rush upon the Pope, and obtain his absolution by force of arms; now, when the spell of the Papal majesty was upon him, he would be willing to crouch in abject submission before his throne. Thus, then, he became incapable of contending with his resolute adversary. His inhuman treatment of the prisoners captured at Parma, his denunciations of the avarice of the clergy, who, he declared in his manifesto, ought to be deprived of their superfluous wealth, had alienated from him many of his former supporters, and had given strength to the league formed against him in Germany. At length the end came. He was overtaken with

¹ Muratori, *Annal.* sub anno.

² Matthew Paris (pp. 1015–16) gives us the words used by him on this occasion, which show his anguish: 'Woe is me! mine own flesh and blood fight against me.' Dante, however, with whom Peter de Vinea conferred in Hell, asserted his innocence.—*Inferno*, xiii. 58.

mortal sickness at Fiorentino, and breathed his last in the arms of his son Manfred, who, with filial duty, spoke to him words of peace and consolation during the last fearful struggle between the body and spirit.

We see then that the Empire was beaten down in this conflict. The Pope succeeded in the deposition of the Emperor. The result is a convincing proof of the awe of the Papacy with which the minds of men were overpowered during the thirteenth century. We have seen that Frederick was the most powerful and beloved monarch who ever sat on the throne of the Holy Roman Empire. He was at the same time terrible in his wrath to all who provoked him to the conflict. The monarchs of Europe, though they did not aid him, did not oppose him in his terrible struggle with the Papacy. The only exception was the weak Henry III., who allowed, as I have said, money to be collected for the Pope in England ; and, though the brother of the Empress, did not prevent the publication of the sentence of excommunication in his realm. Nay, many of the princes and potentates of Europe were very angry when they witnessed the implacable hostility with which he was pursued by the Popes. The pious St. Louis, King of France, and the princes of Germany, were very indignant on account of the audacity of Innocent in deposing a monarch who had no superior in Christendom. The former even declared that he had not found so much religion in the Pope as in the Emperor.¹ Many of the highest Churchmen too ranged themselves on his side. On the other hand, the Western Church was alienated from the Papacy by its extortions and usurpation of benefices. The resentment against the Pope in England on this account was so great that it seemed as if the nation would cast off his usurped dominion.² The rapacity of the Papal See, and the aggressions on the rights of the clergy under Innocent IV., surpassed all description. For extortion and other vices

¹ Matthew Paris, sub ann. 1239.

² Matthew Paris, 1245. He is the best authority for the impressions which prevailed in Christendom. Almost every page contains details and complaints of the exorbitant imposts laid on England by the Roman Church.

Innocent was branded as Antichrist by Robert Grossteste, the noble-minded Bishop of Lincoln.¹ Men were horrified when they witnessed the undying enmity exhibited by those who, as the ambassadors of the Prince of Peace, ought to have allayed instead of fomenting civil discord. This enmity was so great that it led them to heap upon Frederick the most malignant curses,² to utter against him the grossest calumnies, to apply to him the most opprobrious epithets, to encourage designs for his assassination, to stir up rebellion in his dominions, to seek in every way to accomplish his ruin. Innocent IV. hated him so much that, when he heard of his death, he used the following language, which makes us shudder as we read it: 'Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; for the thunder and the tempest with which a powerful God has so long threatened your heads are changed by the death of that man into refreshing breezes and fertilising dews.'³

We see, then, that the Pope was at an obvious disadvantage. But though, further, he was called upon to contend with an adversary who brought to bear against him the whole force of the Empire, by which he was occasionally almost overwhelmed, though he could not induce any of the sovereigns of Europe to come to the rescue, or strike a blow in his defence, though he was aided only by the arms of the free cities, and by the mercenary troops whom the subsidies of England had enabled him to equip, though he had to contend with the citizens of Rome who were often rising in insurrection against him, he was so terrible in his strength that he was able to depose and beat down to the earth this heroic and unfortunate monarch.

We have no doubt that the mendicant friars, the standing army of the Papacy—found alike in the cottage of the poor and the cabinets of princes, whose influence with the multitude has never been surpassed—not only contributed, by

¹ Matthew Paris, pp. 1160-62, 1196.

² *Ibid.* pp. 646, 667-9, 667-85, 812-884.

³ Raynaldus, sub anno 1251, and Sismondi, *Répub. Ital.*, vol. ii., p. 244.

their declamations and by the stories which they circulated through Europe, to loosen the hold of Frederick on the allegiance of his subjects, but also to intensify that religious awe of the Popes which enabled them to proceed successfully to the grossest act of usurpation to be found in the annals of the Papacy.¹ Even Frederick could not shake off his awe of the adversary with whom he was engaged in mortal combat when he was about to gain some important advantage; often he would not persevere in his course, but shrank back overpowered and confounded by the contemplation of one whose form seemed to dilate into a supernatural grandeur, like the form of the Prince of Darkness, as Milton has described him when he stood 'collecting all his might,' 'like Teneriff or Atlas unremoved,' ready to do battle with the angelic squadron of the Almighty. Like Dante, the immortal bard of Italy, Frederick made a distinction between individual popes and the high dignity with which they were invested. Thus the former describes Pope Nicholas as buried in the infernal regions, on account of his simony, head foremost in the livid rock. Flames play over the soles of his feet, causing them to move to and fro in restless agony. He is represented as anticipating a similar fate for Pope Boniface, whom he directly charges with having, by corrupt means, attained the Papal tiara, and with having made use of the opportunities afforded by his exalted dignity to add to the immense piles of wealth which he had accumulated around him.² But yet so strong was Dante's conviction of the dignity of the office that, though he might have been expected to honour Frederick II. on account of his lofty gifts and his persecution of heretics, by which the latter intended to show that he was a true son of the Church, and because he was one of that imperial race to which the poet looked as the means of consolidating the

¹ Peter de Vineia (i. 18-19) says that the mendicant orders, whom he calls 'the Pope's evil angels,' were let loose against Frederick, to inflame the people down to the lowest by their unscrupulous denunciations.

² *Inferno*, canto xix. l. 105-111.

different States of Italy into a kingdom, and of reviving the glories of those days when she sat as a queen among the nations, he has, because of his incessant warfare with the Papacy, considered himself obliged to represent *him* alone of the emperors as placed in the lowest part of hell. We find Frederick in the city of Dis itself, the heat in which is so intense that it illumines with a ruddy glow the iron battlements around it, confined like other heretics in a burning sepulchre, from which are heard groans of the bitterest anguish.¹ Thus, while Frederick honoured the office, he has denounced in the strongest terms the tyranny, the injustice, the rapacity, and the arrogance of the Popes with whom he contended. He and the men of his generation had a far deeper awe of the Papacy than the contemporaries of Henry IV. and Frederick Barbarossa. Though he was pursued by the Popes with a fiercer hatred than they experienced, he could not venture, like them, to set up an antipope; while they raised one potentate after another to the imperial dignity. Occasionally, too, he was disposed to sue humbly for absolution; but, when he found that they spurned him from their feet, he sent them a message of defiance, and fought valiantly against them. He was, like his ancestors, unsuccessful in the struggle. Many in that age recognised the right of the Pope to dethrone him. His deposition, and the struggle to assert his rights which it occasioned, inflicted an injury on the Empire from which it never recovered. No doubt his reverence for the Papacy occasioned an indecision which led to his defeat. Though he never resigned the imperial dignity, he may be said to have been virtually deposed by the edict of Innocent, for he passed the remainder of his life in the midst of war, sedition, and treason, without enjoyment of the repose of royalty, and with a limited possession of the dignity and authority of the Holy Roman Emperor. But, though he was almost heart-broken by his misfortunes, he struggled on bravely to the end of his days, and did not humble himself

¹ Dante, *Inferno*, canto x. ver. 119.

before the Popes, like Henry IV. at Canossa, and Frederick Barbarossa at Venice.

The partisans of Rome have visited this illustrious monarch with unsparing censure; his friends, on the other hand, have regarded him as the incarnation of Deity. The truth lies between the two extremes. The friend of St. Louis could not have been devoid of virtues. We can see that he was remarkable for his justice, magnanimity, and generosity, that he was a man of winning manners, and that he was ardently beloved by his followers; but we can see that the Popes were not altogether wrong when they branded him with censure. He lent his sanction to treachery. If he wished to get an impregnable castle into his hands, we learn from his Registers that he gave this direction to his generals: 'Pretend some business, and warily call the castellan to you; seize on him if you can, and keep him till he cause the castle to be surrendered.' We know also that his character was stained with more than one deed of cruelty. He gave directions that those who had been guilty of treason should be wrapped in lead, and cast into a furnace. He caused twenty noble ladies whom he captured after one of his sieges to be bricked up in a prison, where they died a death of lingering agony. We know also that his harem was the scandal of Christendom. We are sorry to be obliged to add that, though the charge that he was inclined to the religion of Mahomet is an invention of his enemies—for with strange inconsistency they represent him as saying that the three religions of Christ, of Mahomet, and the Jews are to be placed on the same level of imposture—we must admit that he indulged in a dangerous laxity of belief and levity of expression which cast a shade over his character. For instance, he once said that if the God of the Jews had seen his kingdom, the Terra di Lavoro, Calabria, Sicily, and Apulia, He would not have praised the land which He promised to the Jews and bestowed upon them. He was also charged with having, during his crusade, mockingly said to those around him, as he pointed to a corn-field, 'There grows your god!' meaning the bread used in the holy wafer.

We cannot doubt that the unholy lives of the Popes, the injustice with which he was assailed by them, affected unfavourably his belief in the fundamental truths of Christianity. While, however, we see plainly that many charges of the Popes against him were well founded, we altogether deny that he was a monster of wickedness. Even bitter Romanists are obliged to admit that as a man of genius, a poet, a legislator, and a warrior, he was very far above all his contemporaries.

The Popes then beat down to the earth this illustrious monarch. They were determined, too, not to be satisfied till they had rooted out the House of Hohenstaufen.

Manfred, the son of Frederick, who had all his father's good qualities without his father's faults, 'gentle and fair and comely of aspect,'¹ was slain in defending his nephew's inheritance from Charles of Anjou, to whom the Pope had offered it. Conradin, the grandson of Frederick, the last of the race, having been taken prisoner by Charles of Anjou, in an expedition the object of which was to recover his kingdom of Sicily and Naples, was doomed, perhaps with the approval and in accordance with the suggestion of Pope Clement, to be executed as a felon and a rebel on a public scaffold. The fruits of his genius have perished like his race. The Great Charter of John of England is still preserved and regarded with reverence as the palladium of our liberties. The constitutions of Frederick II. are abandoned to a few antiquaries. A few coins, a few mouldering ruins, a few rhymes, and a Latin treatise, are the only remains of one who was in his own day the wonder of the world. In truth we cannot contemplate without emotion that elevation and that downfall, the saddest recorded in history.

We cannot, however, regard the extinction of the House of Hohenstaufen as a calamity. The probability is that, if it had continued to flourish, we should have witnessed the revival of a universal empire in Europe as powerful as the empire of Augustus. Italy and Germany willingly submitted to Frederick's authority. Bohemia, Hungary, Poland, and Denmark

¹ Dante, *Purgatorio*, canto iii. v. 107.

were his obedient vassals. The Greek and Moslem powers were his steadfast allies. Spain was divided into small kingdoms, and France into independent principalities. They could not therefore offer an effectual resistance to the armies of the invader. England was the only country which could have opposed his designs, and she might have been beaten down in the unequal conflict.

From these dangers Europe was delivered by the gold of England, which was freely lavished in this terrible struggle, by the opposition of the Lombard cities, and, above all, by the determination of the Popes, if possible, to be the temporal and spiritual heads of the Holy Roman Empire. We cannot condemn in terms too strong the ambition, and the worldly spirit, and the hatred which they displayed in struggling for the mastery; but we can see that they were instruments in the hands of God for working out His purposes; and that they saved Europe from that subjection to one man which would have palsied its energies, and retarded the onward march of moral and political improvement.