



The Popes During the Carolingian Empire

Horace Mann

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THE period of the history of the papacy, co-extensive with the duration of the Carolingian Empire (795-891), opens under very different external conditions to those which its preceding period (590-795) commenced. During the latter epoch the popes were the nominal subjects at least of the emperors at Constantinople, whose representatives were installed in the crumbling palace on the Palatine. Their election had to be confirmed by them, and their lives and liberties were dependent on their whims. Italy, the center of the papal power, was divided between the rude Lombard and the grasping Byzantine.

But now all this was changed; no longer did the presence among them of a Byzantine duke remind the Romans that their lord and master was a Greek Basileus on the shores of the Bosphorus; no longer were the effigies of the descendants of Constantine received in Rome with the respectful submission due to their prototypes, and placed with honor in the chapel of S. Cesario in Palatio; and no longer did the coins of Rome, by their image and inscription, proclaim that it owed tribute to Caesar. The Byzantine power had vanished from the Eternal City, and, with the exception of Calabria and of a few isolated places (e.g. Naples, Hydruntum, etc.) in S. Italy, from the whole of the peninsula. Rome and Italy had now new masters. Leaving out of account the parts just mentioned and Venice, which was a practically independent state under the protection of Constantinople, the provinces of Italy were in the hands of the Pope and of the Frank. The former, now free in every sense of the word, was lord of Rome and its duchy (along with the southern portion of Tuscany to Populonium), of the old Exarchate of Ravenna, including the Pentapolis, and of the duchy of Perusia (Perugia), which connected these two nearly equal strips of territory. The donations of Pippin and Charlemagne gave him claims over various other portions of Italy; but the rest of the peninsula was, in fact, ruled by the Frankish, either in person or by the intermediary of subject Lombard dukes. In place, then, of being a subject insulted and oppressed by the domineering Greek and terrified by the savage Lombards he was an independent ruler honored and protected by the grateful Frank.

Rome, which already in the days of the first Gregory was falling to pieces, was now, phoenix-like, springing from its ashes into new life and splendor. During the prosperous reign of Leo, its "ever-increasing decay", which St. Gregory had mourned and which had received a great check in the time of Hadrian, was still further arrested. The city was, in fact, furnished with a new lease of life...

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