

Henry IV and Gregory VII

It was when the Empire was thus weakened that the monk Hildebrand, who had already become a great power in the Church was elected as pope. He chose the name of Gregory VII, and under that name he became even more powerful than he had been as Hildebrand. Between him and Henry IV a bitter struggle for supremacy began.

Two years after his inauguration Gregory issued a decree declaring that henceforth bishops should not be chosen by the emperor nor by any lay person, but that the investiture should be entirely in the hands of the Church. Now emperor after emperor had tried to strengthen the clergy in order to curb the power of the nobles. And to do this emperor after emperor had given them lands to hold in fief, until at length a great part of the soil of Germany was in their hands. If, then, the pope alone had power to appoint bishops, all these lands would pass into his control, and the imperial authority would be seriously lessened.

Henry was at this time only twenty-five. He was passionate and ill-balanced, and little calculated to cope with a pope of overweening pride and terrible severity. He was in no mood to yield up any of his authority, and he deposed the pope. For had not his father elected and deposed popes as he would. But Gregory was no German pope, ready to bow to the commands of a German king. Instead of being cowed by this show of imperial power, he replied to it by excommunicating Henry and threatening to depose him if he remained impenitent.

Never before had a pope dared to use such arrogance towards an emperor, and had Henry been surrounded by faith- [97] ful vassals, had he ruled over a united people, the thunders of the pope might have fallen harmless upon him; but because of that dream of world dominion Germany was not united. There was little German loyalty to a ruler who claimed the world as his dominion. Every prince of the Empire was constantly seeking an opportunity to become an independent ruler. Now many saw their opportunity, for the pope had set them free from their allegiance, and Henry found his empire filled with rebellion and his authority vanishing into thin air.

Henry soon saw that only by submitting to the pope could he regain his authority over his rebellious subjects, and he made up his mind to submit at once. It was no repentance for his deed which urged him to this, but merely political necessity. In midwinter he crossed the Alps, and after incredible hardships reached Canossa, where the haughty pope awaited him. There, one bitter winter morning, while the snow lay on the ground, the proud emperor appeared before the castle gates of the still prouder pope. Clad in the garb of a penitent, with head and feet bare, he humbly knocked, begging admission. But the door remained closed. A second and a third day passed, and still Henry stood without the gates, waiting the pleasure of the stern old man within. At length Gregory relented. The penitent king was admitted to his presence, and received absolution. Thus did the inexorable priest uphold before the eyes of all

Christendom the papal right to judge kings. Thus did he make good his claim to loose and to bind in earthly as in heavenly Matters, "to give and to take away empires, kingdoms, principedoms, and the possessions of all men." Without striking a blow, without even having an army behind him, this little, grey-haired priest had conquered "the lord of the world."

But the pope, by his haughty measures, had made an [98] implacable enemy of Henry, and as soon as he felt himself strong enough he defied the pope anew. Again he was excommunicated, and again he replied by deposing the pope. This time he set up an anti-pope and marching to Rome beseiged Gregory there.

After a siege of three years Henry entered the city and received the imperial crown at the hands of his own pope, Clement III. Gregory's day was over, and he fled to Salerno. There he died, but even in death he did not forgive the recreant emperor, and he died leaving his enemy still under the ban of the Church.

Rebellion and civil war filled Henry's last days, and at length, deposed, betrayed, and beggared, he died. But the pope's curse followed him even beyond the grave, and not until five years later was the ban removed and the bones of Henry IV laid to rest in consecrated ground.

Concordat of Worms

Gregory VII was dead, Henry IV was dead, but the struggle over the investiture continued. For succeeding popes clung to the great powers Gregory had claimed, succeeding emperors resisted them. Henry V succeeded his father, Henry IV. He had rebelled against his father during his lifetime, and now the new pope, Paschal II, hoped to find in him an obedient servant; but he was mistaken, and the struggle continued. At length, however, at the Concordat of Worms, Calixtus II being now pope, an agreement was come to. It was agreed that the pope should have the right to investiture with ring and crozier, but that bishops should be chosen with the consent of the emperor, and that they should do homage to him for their fiefs in the same way as laymen.

Thus the struggle of fifty years ended. The pope was, in the main, victorious, for although he had not been able to make good all his claims, he had won much prestige, [99] whereas the emperor had lost much. But although the question of investiture might be settled, the rivalry between pope and emperor, each arrogantly claiming to rule the world, continued as before. More and more the popes strove to make good their claim to be not only the chief priests but the chief princes of Christendom. But it is not uninteresting to note the difference in the treatment meted out by them to Henry of Germany and William of England.

In England the king was supreme in Church and state. There the people alone could give or take away the crown, there the king made and unmade bishops without reference to the pope. But in the hope of making England a fief of the Church the pope, Alexander II, blessed the enterprise of William of Normandy when he set forth to

conquer the kingdom from Harold the Saxon. William, however, pious Churchman as he was, having conquered England, meant to rule there as sole master. Gregory VII also meant to rule there as elsewhere, and after some preliminary skirmishes in which William yielded nothing, he sent a messenger to demand from the king of England an oath probably of fealty, together with the assurance that Peter's Pence should be more punctually paid.

William's reply was very short, very decisive. Bluntly he refused to own himself the pope's man. The kings of England who had gone before him had never sworn fealty to the pope; neither would he. As to Peter's Pence, from ancient times it had been paid, and he would continue to pay it. What was lawfully due to the pope the pope should have. The respect due to the chief priest of Christendom he should also have, and nothing more. The right of investiture, over which pope and emperor quarrelled so fiercely, was never even mentioned, and whatever wrath Gregory may have felt at William's refusal of fealty, no thunders of the Church were launched at the recreant king. This was partly, doubtless, because Gregory was otherwise [100] occupied. His arch-enemy the emperor was again defiant, and had enthroned an anti-pope, and Gregory, gathering his forces to combat him, had little leisure to fight the king of England.

But if the popes were unsuccessful in pressing their claims in England, in Germany they were more successful. During the reign of Lothaire the Saxon, who followed Henry V as ruler of Germany, their power increased. For Lothaire was weakly fearful of arousing the pope's wrath, and he even went so far as to acknowledge the pope as his overlord, in respect of some Italian lands, of which he might have claimed possession outright.