CHAPTER III

The Empire

THE basic social and political structure of the East Frankish kingdom ruled by the descendants of Louis the German was far different from that of the West Frankish state that fell to the successors of Louis' brother, Charles the Bald. Except for Lorraine, which Louis had acquired at the death of his nephew, Lothaire II, none of the lands that composed his kingdom had been part of the Roman Empire for any considerable time. Only Lorraine and Franconia had formed a permanent part of the Merovingian state. The major part of the kingdom, Bavaria, Swabia, Thuringia, and Saxony, had been added to the Frankish state by the early Carolingians.

In the western kingdom the counts administered districts the boundaries of which were those of the Roman civitates. In the eastern kingdom the count was the king's personal representative with vague power of supervision over a group of local popular courts, but there were no stable, organized counties. Vassalage, which had become an important part of the institu-
ditions of the western kingdom, hardly existed in the eastern outside Lorraine and Franconia. Thus the East Frankish state was in general a region of free landholders, large and small, noble and peasant, who ruled themselves through the popular courts under the supervision of the counts. In Bavaria, Swabia, and Saxony there was a certain amount of local patriotism among the people, going back to the days of their independence before their conquest by the Franks. The royal power rested on the king's control over the counts, on the royal estates scattered over the land, and on the king's right to choose the bishops and abbots who held the vast church estates.

The Tribal Duchies

Although the eastern kingdom suffered little from Viking raids, it faced fully as formidable a foe—the savage Magyar horsemen from the Hungarian plain. Before the death of Louis the German they were plundering Bavaria, and by the end of the ninth century they had extended their operations over most of Germany. Louis' descendants found themselves completely unable to defend their kingdom effectively. Hence, there appeared in Bavaria, Swabia, Franconia, and Saxony local military leaders who used the remnants of tribal patriotism to organize resistance to the Magyars and to establish themselves as regional rulers. These leaders took the title of duke, and their duchies are often called "stem" or tribal duchies. The
ambition of each duke was to absorb the royal authority in his duchy—to control the counts, choose the prelates, and usurp the royal estates. During the reign of the last Carolingian king, Louis the Child, who ruled from 899 to 911, the dukes came very close to achieving their purpose.

The extinction of the line founded by Louis the German might have meant the end of the East Frankish kingdom had it not been for the church. The prelates of Germany not only believed in monarchy as an institution, but they were also convinced that the safety of their estates depended on a strong king. During the reign of Louis the Child the dukes had freely usurped ecclesiastical estates in order to build up their own landed power, and lesser nobles had followed their example. The church felt very strongly the need for a crowned and anointed king who would be its ally and curb the greed of the nobles. In general, like the great lords of France, the dukes had no desire for a strong king and would have been pleased to have no king at all, but in the year 911 they too were inclined to seek a national leader. The Magyar raids were at their worst and all Germany except Saxony had suffered from them. Without a king organized resistance was almost impossible, as no duke could be persuaded to act unless his own duchy was being invaded. Hence, the dukes joined with the prelates to elect a king—Conrad, duke of Franconia.

Unfortunately Conrad was not a strong king. As a
military leader he failed to check the Magyars, who carried their raids as far as Bremen in northern Germany. He also lacked the resources needed to curb the dukes. As the Carolingian estates had been largely usurped during the reign of Louis the Child, Conrad was obliged to rely on his own duchy, and Franconia was far weaker in material and human resources than the other stem duchies. The dukes of Saxony, Swabia, and Bavaria ignored the king and went on consolidating their power. By the end of Conrad's reign each duke wielded full royal authority within his own duchy, and the king was a mere figurehead. Conrad saw the situation very clearly. He realized that if a strong German monarchy was to be developed, it must be done by the most powerful of the dukes. Therefore as he lay on his deathbed he designated Henry, duke of Saxony, as his successor and directed his younger brother to secure Henry's succession to the throne.

The House of Saxony

Saxony was by far the strongest of the stem duchies. Entirely untouched by the feudal institutions that were beginning to spread from Franconia into southern Germany, it was a country of noble and nonnoble free landholders. These men made excellent soldiers and were completely devoted to their ducal house. Thus the Saxon kings had a firm and adequate nucleus for their power. The five monarchs of this dynasty
were to rule Germany for over a century, 919–1024. They were to develop and consolidate the royal power in Germany itself, direct the first attempt of the Germans to expand over the lands between the Elbe and the Oder, and revive in a new form the conception of the empire.

The first task of the Saxon kings was the expulsion of the Magyars. Although Henry I defeated them in battle and limited the extent of their raids, this menace to Germany was ended only by his son Otto I’s great victory of the Lechfeld in 955. This battle freed the Bavarian Ostmark, modern Austria, from the Magyars, and some years later it was erected into a separate frontier province ruled by a royal appointee. With the reconquest of this region the Germans reached their permanent frontier on the southeast.

The Royal Power

The chief concern of all the Saxon kings was the development of their power in Germany. Saxony itself was never given to a younger son but was held firmly in the hands of the crown. When the younger brother of King Conrad died in 939, his duchy was taken over by Otto I. With Saxony and Franconia supplying them with a solid base, the kings were able gradually to reduce the authority of the dukes of Swabia and Bavaria. The royal estates usurped by the dukes were recovered and the counts were brought directly under the king’s control. Moreover, feudal
ideas were introduced into the relationship between the king and the dukes—the latter were obliged to hold their offices as royal vassals.

Placing the counts directly under the control of the crown served to weaken the dukes but did not supply the king with reliable local agents, since the counts were nobles who were chiefly interested in increasing their own lands and power. To supply this deficiency the Saxon kings turned to the church. As we have seen, the prelates of Germany had been the chief supporters of the monarchy in its period of weakness in the late ninth century. The church maintained vigorously the conception of the king as a ruler appointed by God—rex et sacerdos. Hence, a close alliance between crown and church was perfectly natural. The first step of the Saxon kings was to recover the power of appointing bishops and abbots that had been usurped by the dukes. Then the kings took the prelates and their lands under their protection. The estates of the church were removed from the jurisdiction of the counts, and special royal agents called advocates exercised the comtal authority there under the supervision of the prelates. Finally in many cases the king gave a prelate one or more counties. The ancient duchy of Franconia was practically divided between the bishops of Wurzburg and Bamberg. This system greatly strengthened the monarchy. A bishopric could not become hereditary, and the king could in general make certain that it was held by a man who could be trusted. The prelates be-
came the chief local agents of the crown, and a large part of the royal army was drawn from the church estates. In short, this alliance between crown and church was the primary base of the power of the Saxon kings outside their own duchies of Saxony and Franconia.

Conquest in the East

As their duchy of Saxony was the chief source of their power, Henry I and Otto I were deeply interested in extending its frontiers. Henry carried out a series of campaigns by which he forced the Slavic tribes on the eastern border of his duchy to accept him as overlord and pay him tribute. Otto went much farther. He conquered the region between the Elbe and the Oder and filled it with well-garrisoned fortresses. Although these burhs were thickest in the March of Thuringia lying to the east of that province, they were also scattered over the whole countryside. Otto kept a tight hold over the southern part of the conquered region, and its margrave, Gero, was simply his agent, but in the northern section he gave a free hand to a great Saxon noble, Hermann Billung.

Just as Otto and the church were allies in consolidating the royal power, so they worked together in subduing the Slavic tribes. When Otto conquered a tribe, he obliged its members to pay tithes to the church. He founded new bishoprics in the conquered territory and endowed them with vast grants of land. In 962 he established the archbishopric of Magdeburg.
According to the arrangement made with the pope, this see was to have no eastern boundary so that it could cover any Slavic lands Otto or his successors might conquer.

Unfortunately, the German conquerors, laymen and ecclesiastics alike, were both greedy and cruel. They collected all the profits they could, and any resistance was punished by savage massacres. As a result, in 983 when Otto II was occupied in Italy, the Slavs rose in a general revolt and drove out their German masters. Except for the thick mass of fortresses in the western part of the March of Thuringia, all the new burgs and episcopal seats were destroyed. The German colonization of the region between the Elbe and Oder was thus postponed until the twelfth century.

The Middle Kingdom

Under the Saxon kings Germany was by far the most powerful state of western Europe, and it was only natural that its rulers should desire to control the fragments of Lothaire's middle kingdom—Italy and the borderlands between Germany and the western kingdom. This was not pure imperialistic ambition. The royal power of the German kings was largely centered in the north in Saxony and Franconia. If a rival house, especially if it were the ducal house of Swabia or Bavaria, could combine Italy and the kingdom of Burgundy, it could build up a position in the south that would seriously threaten the power of the
Saxon kings. This menace almost became a reality in 926 when Rudolf, king of Italy and Burgundy, attempted to succeed his father-in-law as duke of Swabia. When Rudolf died, his lands fell into confusion, with fierce civil war between rival claimants. The dukes of Swabia and Bavaria both extended their lands to the southward and waited hopefully for an opportunity to seize all or part of Rudolf’s inheritance. Otto could not permit this to happen. He seized Burgundy in the name of Rudolf’s son Conrad, who later ruled that kingdom as his vassal. Then in 951 he invaded Italy, assumed for himself the Lombard crown, and married Rudolf’s daughter. Eleven years later he was solemnly crowned emperor by the pope and thus founded what was later called the Holy Roman Empire.

There is no reason to suppose that Otto I thought that he was reviving the empire of Charlemagne, much less the Roman Empire in the West. Neither he nor his successors made any attempt to extend their power over the West Frankish state. Otto believed that the safety of the German kingdom demanded that its rulers control the middle kingdom once possessed by Lothaire. As Lothaire had been emperor, that dignity constituted to some extent a title to those lands. This was particularly important while vassals of royal rank ruled the Burgundian kingdom. In short, Otto became emperor in the interest of his German kingdom and never showed much concern for Italy. His only at-
tempt to develop his power in that kingdom consisted of an extension of his policy of close alliance with the church. He made important grants of lands and privileges to the bishops of northern Italy in the hope of winning their loyalty to his dynasty. Except for his grandson Otto III, or rather the ministers who ruled in his name, the later Saxon emperors showed the same lack of interest in Italian affairs. They sought to maintain their authority in Italy by winning the support of one of the factions struggling for power in that kingdom. Sometimes they would favor the bishops and at others the great lords. This policy was never strikingly successful. When the emperor was in Italy with a German army, he was the master of the land. In his absence the local factions struggled for supremacy. The ministers of Otto III followed a different policy. They attempted to develop a strong government by importing German officials, but the effort was not sufficiently prolonged to be successful. Essentially the Saxon emperors were German kings who simply wanted to be sure that no one else dominated Italy.

_The Salian Dynasty_

In 1002 the death of Otto III brought to an end the senior line of the Saxon dynasty. Although his successor, Henry II, is usually considered a member of the Saxon line because he was the head of a junior branch of the house, Henry was a south German lord whose power lay largely in Bavaria. The death of
Henry in 1024 was followed by the election of Conrad, called the Salian, the descendant of a daughter of Otto I, as king. Conrad's power was centered in Franconia and Swabia. He was the founder of the Salian line that was to rule Germany and the empire for just over a century.

Within their German realm the Salian kings faced different problems from those that had given concern to their predecessors. The Saxon monarchs had largely devoted their energies to breaking the power of the stem duchies and assuming direct royal authority over the counts and prelates. In this they had been entirely successful. The dukes had failed to turn their military leadership into territorial power, and Germany had become a united state instead of a loose confederation of autonomous duchies. But the Saxon kings had worried little about the rapidly growing power of the aristocracy. The counts and great landholders were directly dependent on the king, yet he could not effectively control them. In short, the Saxon kings had nothing that can be called an administrative system. Their power rested essentially on their personal prestige, the strength of the monarchical tradition, and their success in placing their friends among the aristocracy in important positions. But the nobles as a whole enjoyed almost complete independence as long as they did not actually rebel against the crown. Their power was based on lands that they owned. Although many nobles, especially in Bavaria and Franconia,
Feudal Monarchies

held both the office of count and fiefs granted to them as vassals, these were incidental additions to their basic resources. By the time of Conrad II some of these nobles had become extremely powerful and were fully as dangerous to the monarchy as the old stem dukes had been. Thus, in Saxony members of the house of Billung were practically the masters of the lands between the Weser and the Elbe and were serious rivals to the royal authority in Saxony. The Welf family had built up a somewhat similar position in Bavaria and Swabia. But these two families were simply the most noted examples of successful aristocratic enterprise. All over Germany nobles great and small were developing local centers of power and almost complete independence of effective control.

Administration of the Realm

The Salian kings saw that if the monarchy was to maintain its position against the nobles, it needed firmer bases for its power. The primary requirement was effective royal agents who were devoted to the crown. For this purpose Conrad II began to use a peculiarly German institution—ministeriales. These were non-freemen who were employed for knightly functions. The idea apparently originated in the German church. When the Saxon kings insisted that the church supply knights for their army, it did so by giving lands to unfree tenants in return for knight service. Thus land was given in return for service as in western feudalism,
but the fact that the holders of the fiefs were unfree prevented them from claiming the ordinary rights of vassals. The land remained in full possession of the church, and its holder could be displaced at any time. Conrad put royal ministeriales in charge of the estates of the crown. His successors were to use them to garrison castles, hold important offices, and in any other capacity that seemed necessary. By this means the Salian kings hoped to establish a royal administration independent of the aristocracy and devoted to the service of the crown. This device was not essentially unlike the later Capetian practice of using men drawn from its towns as officials, but the ministeriales were even more dependent on their master than the townsmen.

In addition to a loyal bureaucracy the monarchy needed a strong territorial base that was strategically located from a military point of view. The original center of the power of the Salian house lay in Franconia. By extending its direct control over Thuringia and southern Saxony it could hold the strategic heart of Germany. This plan had several incidental advantages. A center of royal authority in south Saxony would serve to curb the most dangerous of the rising noble families, the Billungs. But of still greater importance was the fact that the Harz mountains contained valuable silver mines. By ruling that region the crown could secure a money income that would add greatly to its strength.
The Development of Saxony

Henry III chose Goslar as the seat of royal authority in south Saxony and built a strong castle there. His son Henry IV decided to make Goslar the permanent capital of his kingdom. There he built a palace that is probably the best extant example of eleventh-century civil architecture and then set to work to turn the whole country around Goslar into a great royal military stronghold. South Saxony and Thuringia were filled with royal castles garrisoned by devoted ministeriales drawn from distant estates of the Salian house. In addition, Henry carried on a vigorous campaign to restore the rights enjoyed by the Saxon kings in their duchy. He revived long forgotten payments and services due from the Saxon freemen and enforced the royal monopoly of the forests.

The policy of the Salian kings was deeply resented by all elements of Saxon society. The Billungs objected vigorously to having a center of royal power within what they considered their sphere of influence. The nobles as a whole despised the lowly born ministeriales and considered it outrageous to have them commanding royal castles, administering crown lands, and even acting as ministers of state. The free peasants were aggrieved by the revival and rigorous enforcement of ancient ducal rights. The result was a series of Saxon rebellions between 1070 and 1075. Henry IV’s ministeriales held his castles vigorously, and the rest of Ger-
many supported him. The Saxons were defeated and their rebellion crushed. Thus in 1075 Henry IV seemed well on the way to building a strong German monarchy and creating a unified German state. At a time when William the Conqueror was just beginning the formation of the English monarchy and the Capetian kings were helpless feudal overlords, the king of Germany had a fixed capital, a secure money income, and an efficient and loyal body of crown servants.

The Church and the State

Unfortunately, just as Henry was ready to complete and solidify the work of the Salian house, a storm that had been brewing for some time burst suddenly about his head. In a letter of December 8, 1075, Pope Gregory VII threatened to depose Henry unless he made full submission to the papacy. This was not only the first step in a long and bitter struggle that was eventually to destroy the German monarchy but it was also the first definite announcement of an entirely new conception of the relationship between church and state.

As we have seen, during the ninth and tenth centuries the church had consistently preached the sacred character of kingship. The king was appointed by God to rule and his anointment by the church gave him a priestly character—he was rex et sacerdos, king and priest. The church had as a matter of course supported the kings with all its resources. It seems likely that it
was this alliance between crown and church that had saved the French monarchy from extinction, and it was the chief bulwark of the power of the Saxon kings of Germany. It had also safeguarded the material possessions of the church from the greedy warriors of western Europe and had brought to the prelates extensive political privileges and powers. In short, throughout Europe and particularly in Germany the alliance had been to the material advantage of both parties. But it had not in general been beneficial to the spiritual development of the church. Prelates were chosen largely because they could be useful to the king as statesmen, warriors, and local agents. Few kings showed any great interest in the spiritual qualifications of their appointees. Moreover, these prelates were as a rule interested in the development of their own and the royal authority and cared little for the position of the church as a whole. Thus the alliance between crown and church had led to the almost complete secularization of the church. Except for his costume it was hard to tell a bishop from a baron.

The Cluniac Reform Movement

The foundation of the abbey of Cluny in 910 inaugurated an attempt to check the secularization of the regular clergy. With Cluny as its center a great wave of monastic reform spread over western Europe. As the monasteries were not of too great political importance, this phase of the Cluniac movement was well
received by most lay lords and the order grew with astounding rapidity. Then early in the eleventh century ecclesiastics who were imbued with the Cluniac spirit of reform began to turn their eyes toward the secular church. Here too, in Germany at least, they soon found an enthusiastic lay ally. The Emperor Henry III was convinced that church reform was his chief duty. Moreover, his position enabled him to start the reform where it was most needed—with the papacy itself.

The Saxon emperors had treated the papacy as they had treated other Italian factions: sometimes as an ally, sometimes as a foe. Occasionally they had intervened to place their own candidates on the papal throne and always had insisted on their right to confirm papal elections. Their interest in the papacy was purely political, as one of the powers that had to be managed in order to maintain the imperial authority in Italy. But Henry III believed that the papacy alone could lead a general reform of the church, and he placed a series of reforming popes on the papal throne. These men began the construction of the great papal monarchy that was to play so important a part in the history of the next three centuries. Their object was to reform the church by making it subject to strict papal control.

Henry III seems to have failed to realize that this movement was bound to threaten the alliance between crown and church in Germany. His intention was to
have reforming popes and reforming bishops all chosen by him and loyal to him as well as to the cause of reform. Many of the reforming clergy agreed with this point of view. They saw the divinely appointed king working hand in hand with the papacy to raise the spiritual level of both the clerical and lay worlds. But others felt that effective church reform depended on complete independence from lay control. The pope must be the sole master of the church. As it was most unlikely that the lay rulers would agree to this, this branch of the reform party was in reality committed to a campaign against the secular rulers.

*The Investiture Controversy*

During the latter years of the reign of Henry III and the minority of Henry IV the leader of the radical reform party was an Alsatian ecclesiastic named Hildebrand. His purpose was to remove the church from lay control, place it firmly under the authority of the papacy, and make the pope the acknowledged head of Christendom. To him the king was not divinely appointed and had no sacred character. He was a sort of police chief to be elected by his subjects to rule as long as he ruled properly. If he ruled improperly, he could be removed by Christ's vicar, the pope. Hildebrand probably inspired the establishment of the college of cardinals as an electoral body in order to end imperial control of papal elections. In 1073, some eight years after Henry IV attained his majority,
Hildebrand became pope as Gregory VII. He promptly issued a decree insisting that bishops be elected in accord with the canons of the church and denying the king's right to invest them with the symbols of their office. If carried out, this would immediately break the king's control over the German church. Although Henry IV was planning a new basis for the power of his monarchy, he had no intention of giving up the system that had served his ancestors so well, and he ignored the pope's order. The result was the letter of 1075 threatening him with deposition.

It would be futile to attempt a detailed account of the long and bitter contest between Henry IV and Gregory VII. It was a war fought for political ends with both spiritual and secular weapons. Pope Gregory had as allies the Norman kingdom of Sicily, the powerful countess of Tuscany, and the majority of the lay aristocracy of Germany. Henry had the support of the loyal servants of the Salian house and the majority of the bishops of Germany and Lombardy, who had little enthusiasm for reform and less desire to be controlled by the pope. Henry's reply to Gregory's letter threatening him with deposition was to gather his clergy at Worms and declare that Gregory should be deposed as a false pope. Gregory thereupon excommunicated Henry and absolved his subjects from their allegiance to him. The German nobles then rose and informed Henry that unless he received ab-
solution they would proceed to elect a new king. Henry crossed the Alps, rallied his Lombard allies, and found the pope at the countess of Tuscany's castle of Canossa. There after a humiliating show of peni-
tence he was absolved.

The nobles of Germany, however, proceeded to elect a new king, who was soon killed in battle. A fierce civil war waged in both Germany and Italy ended with Pope Gregory's flight from Rome and his death at Salerno in the Norman kingdom. But Gregory's successors continued to foster revolt in Ger-

man, and the rest of Henry's reign was occupied by civil strife—much of it against his own rebellious sons. Henry died in 1106 and was succeeded by his son Henry V, who was able to restore peace in Ger-

man and make some progress in carrying on his fa-

ther's domestic policy. The investiture controversy, the nominal cause of the struggle between empire and papacy, was settled in 1122. German bishops were to be elected by the cathedral chapters in the presence of the emperor or his representative, who was also to invest the newly elected prelate with the insignia of his temporal office. In short, the German king could continue to control episcopal elections.

The Age of Castles and Communes

The civil wars that accompanied the investiture controversy had profound effects on the social and political structure of both Germany and Lombardy.
In Germany the anarchy resulting from civil strife led to rapid development of feudal and manorial institutions. Every nobleman with sufficient resources built a castle from which he could dominate the countryside and plunder his weaker neighbors. The only safety for minor nobles lay in becoming the vassals of more powerful ones. The ordinary freeman had two choices: he could become the vassal of a noble or sink into serfdom on some noble’s manor. The ministeriales shook themselves free from their servile bonds and became vassals. Yet the feudalization of Germany was not complete as it was in England and France. The greater lords retained the lands they had held in full ownership, but many of them held fiefs as well. The lesser nobles were largely forced to become vassals holding their lands as fiefs. All, high and low, built castles and, under one excuse or another, usurped full rights of jurisdiction over the inhabitants of their lands. The nonnoble freeman who had been such an important element in German society practically disappeared. Even the prelates took part in this scramble for feudal power. They raised troops by enfeoffing knights and forced the minor nobles in their neighborhood to become their vassals.

In Lombardy it was Henry’s allies, the bishops, who suffered from the civil strife. Their vassals rebelled against them and formed sworn associations or communes to exercise the political authority once held by the bishops. These communes were scattered over the
countryside in both rural and urban communities, but as the cities were the seats of the bishops, the urban communes were far more powerful than the rural ones. Once they had broken the power of the bishops, they began to extend their authority. The rural nobles who had not at first joined the communes were forced to do so or were deprived of their lands. Only a few very powerful lords were able to remain independent of the dominance of the city communes. Thus Lombardy became a land of city-states governed by local aristocracies.

Although Henry V made some attempt to continue the policy of his father in Germany, he was in general helpless before the growing power of the nobles. When he died childless in 1106, the great lords pointedly ignored his designated heir, his nephew Frederick of Hohenstaufen, duke of Swabia, and elected as king Lothar of Supplinburg, duke of Saxony. This step was clearly intended to weaken the monarchy by making it elective. Actually, Lothar was unable to exercise any effective power. He owed the throne to the great lords and held it only by continually granting them lands and privileges. Moreover, his rival Frederick of Swabia refused for years to recognize him as king and carried on a fierce civil war against him. The story of these two rival houses illuminates the history of Germany in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. The father of Frederick of Hohenstaufen was a minor Swabian noble who was successful in developing his
power during the civil wars of Henry IV’s reign and eventually married the king’s daughter, with whom he received the title of duke of Swabia. Lothar of Supplinburg was another successful upstart who at the death of the last Billung duke of Saxony had obtained that duchy on the ground that his mother was a Billung. In short, the nobles of Germany were choosing their kings from their own ranks without regard for hereditary right. This process was repeated at Lothar’s death in 1137. Lothar had designated as his heir the head of the great house of Welf, his son-in-law Henry, duke of Bavaria, but the great lords elected instead Conrad, brother of Frederick, duke of Swabia. Again they were successful in obtaining a weak and pliable monarch who gave them no serious trouble.

The Houses of Welf and Hohenstaufen

During Conrad’s reign there was almost continuous strife between the houses of Welf and Hohenstaufen. The death of Lothar had made Duke Henry of Bavaria duke of Saxony with the result that his resources exceeded those of the crown. When he died in 1139, he was succeeded by his very able son Henry, called the Lion, who was one of the great figures of German history. The weak and colorless Conrad could do little more than try to stir up rival nobles to annoy Duke Henry. When Conrad died in 1152, even the German aristocracy was tired of civil strife and sought a king who could restore order. Their choice fell on
Conrad's nephew, Frederick of Hohenstaufen, duke of Swabia. From the point of view of the nobles Frederick was the ideal candidate. By passing over Conrad's son they were able to affirm the elective principle. Yet the man they chose was both the effective head of the house of Hohenstaufen and a first cousin of Henry the Lion. Actually the nobles had chosen better than they intended; they had elected one of the great men of the age.

Frederick I of Hohenstaufen, usually called Barbarossa from his red beard, faced extremely difficult problems. The whole structure on which the Saxon and Salian state had rested had disappeared, and he had to construct a new monarchy on new bases. Even the political theories that supported the royal and imperial authority had to be revised to meet the high pretensions of the successors of Gregory VII on the papal throne. Here Frederick showed no hesitation in taking the offensive. The revival of the study of Roman law made available the political ideas on which the Late Roman Empire had been based. Frederick was not content to be merely king and priest—he was the sacred emperor and God's regent in Christendom. To emphasize this continuity between imperial Rome and imperial Germany he arranged for the canonization of Charlemagne. But Frederick had no intention of carrying this line of thought too far. The Roman emperors had been elected at least in theory by the Roman Senate. Charlemagne had been crowned by the
pope and the papal party argued that he had been given the imperial title by the pope. The famous forgery, the Donation of Constantine, by which the pope was granted the rule of the western half of the empire, was a powerful weapon in the papal arsenal. Frederick brushed all this aside. He was entitled to all the powers of the Roman emperors, but his right rested on conquest. The German kings had won the empire by the sword.

An Imperial Policy

Frederick I was the first German king whose policy was essentially imperial and who devoted the major part of his attention to his non-German lands. In Germany he was content to force the great lords to recognize their feudal obligations to the crown and to leave them to rule their vassals. As long as he was not faced with actual rebellion, he left the German princes to pursue their own courses. He himself turned to the thorough subjugation of Italy. Historians have explained this policy in two strikingly different ways. Some have concluded that Frederick was overcome by his own political theory and was filled with imperialistic dreams. According to these writers, he sacrificed his opportunity to build up an effective government in Germany to his desire to be master of Italy. The other view is that Frederick had little choice and followed the only practical course. The royal demesne of the Salian kings had disappeared during the civil
wars. Outside his duchy of Swabia, Frederick was simply the feudal suzerain of the German princes, and any attempt to build up direct royal power based on demesne and castles seemed utterly hopeless. Even in Swabia Frederick’s power was not too solid. Although he held the ducal title and had extensive demesne, much of the duchy was in the hands of powerful vassals who were almost as independent as the other German lords. The revival of trade and commerce had, moreover, made Lombardy an extremely rich and prosperous region. If he could get it firmly in hand and draw a large revenue from it, he would have a sound base to operate from. Combining Swabia, Burgundy, and Lombardy would give him an integrated territorial power. In short, according to this school of historians, Frederick’s only chance of effectively controlling Germany was to develop overwhelming power in the imperial lands outside the German realm.

The Lombard League

Soon after his accession Frederick set to work to reestablish the imperial power in Lombardy. His object was to see that the officials who ruled the communes were either his appointees or elected officials confirmed by him with the understanding that they ruled as his agents. He also demanded fixed money payments to swell the imperial treasury. For a time he was successful. Although Milan gave some trouble, most of the towns accepted Frederick’s terms. The
emperor then turned his eyes southward, and his agents began to demand imperial dues in Tuscany and the Romagna. This brought on an immediate clash with the papacy. The pope had been troubled by the development of imperial power in Lombardy, but he was thoroughly alarmed when Frederick invaded the Patrimony of St. Peter. The conflict became sharper when in 1159 a new and more strongly anti-imperial pope ascended the papal throne. The new pontiff immediately renewed the traditional alliance between the papacy and the Norman kingdom of Sicily and began to incite the Lombard towns to revolt. Milan grasped the opportunity, rose in rebellion, and was utterly destroyed by the enraged emperor. Frederick filled Lombardy with fierce German knights who ruled with a heavy and barbaric hand. The result was a general alliance of all the Lombard towns: the Lombard League. Frederick retired to Germany and mustered a great army with which to crush the Lombard cities, but in 1176 he was utterly defeated by the forces of the League in the battle of Legnano. His only course was to make peace. By an agreement reached in 1183 the communes received full rights of self-government. They did, however, admit that they were vassals of the empire and agreed to pay an annual rent for the imperial functions exercised by their officials. Lombardy remained a source of revenue, but it was not a base for imperial political authority.

In the treaty of 1183 the Lombard League agreed
to aid Frederick in recovering his imperial rights in the rest of Italy. Two years later he made a formal alliance with Milan for this purpose. Hence, although he had been checked in Lombardy, he continued to develop an effective imperial administration in Tuscany, the Romagna, Spoleto, and Ancona. Except for a few great cities such as Florence, Siena, and Pisa that were placed on an equal footing with the Lombard communes the towns of these regions were placed under German officials. By the end of Frederick’s reign central Italy was ruled by German imperial officers and paid taxes to the imperial treasury. To strengthen his position in this region he came to an agreement with the Normans and his son Henry married a Sicilian princess. His arrangements in central Italy had but one serious weakness: they had been made in defiance of the papacy and were not recognized by it. This troubled Frederick very little, but it was to be a serious problem for his successors. Otherwise Frederick had been completely successful in establishing in central Italy the firm basis for his imperial power that he had failed to find in Lombardy.

Henry the Lion

During the early years of his reign Frederick kept on good terms with his cousin Henry the Lion. He even gave him the fortress of Goslar and its territory as a fief, thus rounding out Henry’s duchy of Saxony. But as the years went on Duke Henry grew more and
more powerful. A series of successful campaigns against the Slavs had added to his lands much of the territory between the Elbe and the Oder formerly conquered and lost by his Billung ancestors. His marriage to an English princess, a daughter of King Henry II, increased his prestige. Moreover, he had taken advantage of Frederick's quarrels with the papacy to usurp the lands of Saxon prelates who supported the pope. Frederick decided that Henry was becoming too powerful and in 1168 deprived him of Goslar. From that time on the two cousins were bitter foes. Henry was waiting until a good opportunity appeared for successful revolt, but that opportunity never came, for by 1180 Frederick was ready to strike. Duke Henry was ordered to restore the church lands he had seized. When he failed to obey, he was summoned to the king's court. His failure to answer this summons resulted in his condemnation and the loss of all his lands. Frederick divided Saxony in half. The western part, known as Westphalia, was given to the archbishop of Cologne, while the eastern section was granted Bernard of Anhalt, a great-grandson of the last Billung duke. Bavaria was given to Otto of Wittelsbach, whose descendants ruled it until 1918.

The crushing of Henry the Lion was not inconsistent with Frederick’s general policy of strengthening the greater lords of Germany. He simply did not want one man to be too powerful. In fact, his action in giving Henry’s lands to others instead of turning
them into royal estates seemed to give sanction to a principle that had long been favored by the great nobles—that lands once granted by the crown as a fief could not be taken into the demesne again. It was indeed Frederick who really started the German princely class by giving his tenants in chief special privileges that raised them above the rank and file of the nobility. Thus he organized a definite and recognized feudal hierarchy and turned the German monarchy into a feudal state. Within Germany the king became a feudal suzerain with few resources under his direct control. This was not too serious as long as the monarchs had extensive resources outside Germany to bolster their power, but it meant that the loss of those outside resources would doom the crown to impotence.

The Kingdom of Sicily

Frederick Barbarossa died on a crusade in 1190 and was succeeded by his eldest son, Henry VI. As the husband of Constance of Sicily, Henry was already deeply involved in Italian politics. At the time of her marriage it was agreed that Constance should be queen of Sicily if her nephew, King William II, should die without children. But the idea of being ruled by a German prince was repugnant to the Sicilian barons, and when William died in 1189 they chose as king Tancred, count of Lecce, an illegitimate son of Constance's younger brother Roger. As soon as he
mounted the German throne, Henry proceeded to assert his claims on Sicily. Tancred managed to hold his own until his death in 1194, but his son William was unable to hold at bay Henry’s German army and soon the latter was master of the Norman kingdom.

Obviously from one point of view the acquisition of Sicily was a tremendous gain for the house of Hohenstaufen. It was a highly organized and efficient feudal state with a large revenue. At the same time its possession involved certain serious disadvantages. The Sicilian kingdom was part of the Mediterranean world, and the interests of its kings had been centered in that area. Even their ambitions to make conquests in Greece were inherited by their German successor. Although Henry never actually took any action in this direction, his plans for it diverted his attention from problems nearer home. Moreover, it was almost impossible to hope that the papacy could be reconciled to having one monarch rule all Italy. Sooner or later such an arrangement was bound to reduce the pope to the status of the chief prelate of the empire. Finally the solidification of his position in Italy was certain to require most of Henry’s attention and resources at a time when the domestic problems of Germany were calling for consideration. With the acquisition of Sicily, Henry became essentially an Italian king, whether or not he himself was conscious of the fact.

Henry realized that his chief need was to come to
an agreement with the papacy. He offered the pope a large annual revenue in return for the abandonment of the papal claims to the Romagna, Ancona, and Spoleto. But he refused to consider giving up the Sicilian crown and even declined to do homage to the pope as had the Norman kings. Naturally the pope would not accept the offer. It meant giving up a large part of the papal states and reconciling himself to the idea of a unified Italian kingdom. Not even Henry's plea that he planned to lead a great crusade could move the pontiff.

Next to obtaining papal recognition of his position, Henry's chief desire was to persuade the princes of Germany to make the kingship hereditary, thus safeguarding the succession of his young son Frederick. This the princes absolutely refused to do, but they finally agreed to elect Frederick king while his father lived and so in theory at least insure his succession. Thus the princes kept the elective principle intact while granting Henry his immediate desire. Unfortunately for the house of Hohenstaufen, the infant king was to succeed all too quickly. Less than a year after his son's coronation Henry VI died in Sicily.

At first it appeared that the premature death of Henry VI would not seriously affect the Hohenstaufen regime. The German imperial officers in Italy and Sicily seemed able to hold their own, and Henry's brother Philip, duke of Swabia, declared himself regent for his young nephew. Philip was an able man
who was respected throughout the empire, and he
was enthusiastically accepted by the majority of the
German princes. Soon, however, he found himself
facing the ancient foes of his house—the Welfs and
the papacy.

The Pontificate of Innocent III

Early in 1198 Innocent III ascended the papal
throne. He was a man of strong and dominant char-
acter who had great ability and was thoroughly im-
bued with the most exalted ideas of the papal office.
He believed, probably correctly, that the independ-
ence of the papacy required the possession of a strong
secular state and a divided Italy. He therefore set to
work to regain the lost parts of the Patrimony of St.
Peter and to separate the empire from Sicily. While
he recognized young Frederick of Hohenstaufen as
rightful king of Sicily, he encouraged the Sicilian
barons to eject Henry’s German officials and to rule
the kingdom themselves in the name of their infant
lord. But as he was determined to prevent the uniting
of the empire and Sicily, he could not accept Philip
of Swabia as regent of the empire.

Actually it seems unlikely that the pope alone could
have given Philip much trouble. But unfortunately
the Welf, or rather the anti-Hohenstaufen, party in
Germany was still in existence, headed by the power-
ful archbishop of Cologne. The second son of Henry
the Lion, Otto, was living in England and was high in
favor with his uncle, Richard I. Richard's bitter foe was King Philip Augustus of France, and for some years he had been subsidizing the German princes of the Rhine valley in order to gain their aid against the French king. Naturally it occurred to Richard that it would be very convenient to have his nephew master of Germany. Hence Otto set out to seek the German throne well supplied with pounds sterling. On July 12, 1198, he was crowned king by his partisans. This convinced the princes who supported the house of Hohenstaufen that the empire could not survive a long minority, and they persuaded Philip of Swabia to accept the crown. Thus Germany had three coronations in two years—young Frederick of Hohenstaufen in 1196 and Otto and Philip in 1198.

Even with the aid of funds from England Otto found it impossible to make any headway against Philip of Swabia, and in 1208 he retired to England. Innocent III was so thoroughly discouraged with his failure that he prepared to come to terms with Philip. But suddenly a fresh stroke of misfortune came upon the house of Hohenstaufen—King Philip was assassinated by a private enemy. The German princes immediately re-elected Otto, and he marched to Rome where Innocent placed on his head the imperial crown. The pope soon found that he had miscalculated. As an adventurer seeking the German throne, Otto had cheerfully promised the pope the return of the lands he claimed. As emperor, he immediately took up the
policy of Barbarossa and Henry VI: not only did he make clear to the pope that he meant to keep the imperial lands in central Italy, but he proceeded to invade the kingdom of Sicily. Innocent found himself faced with a difficult choice. He could allow Otto to become master of the empire and Sicily, hoping for some later chance to retrieve the papal position, or he could depose him and support an antiking. But the only rival with any chance of success was Frederick of Hohenstaufen, and his triumph would also combine the empire and Sicily. Innocent waited eight months before coming to a final decision. Then he excommunicated Otto and threw all his power behind the cause of Frederick. We can only guess at the pope’s reasons. Otto was a mature man who would be hard to change. Frederick was still a boy who was at least nominally a papal ward. He might perhaps be molded. Then, despite his arrogance and ambition, Innocent was a firm believer in justice. Frederick was undoubtedly the rightful king of Sicily, and as a minor he was in the wardship of his suzerain, the pope. Innocent could hardly stand by and allow Otto to conquer his ward’s kingdom.

Frederick II of Hohenstaufen

Frederick’s success was rapid. The Hohenstaufen party in Germany rallied around him, and King Philip Augustus—who knew that Otto and his uncle King John of England were planning a joint invasion of
France—made an alliance with Frederick and loaned him a large sum of money. In December, 1212, Frederick was crowned at Mainz. On July 27, 1214, the crushing defeat of Otto by King Philip at Bouvines left Frederick master of Germany. The son of Henry VI was the ruler of the vast lands of his father.

Frederick II had spent his boyhood in Sicily, and his interest centered in that realm. He liked the sunny skies and considered Germany a hopelessly cold, wet, and gloomy land. He was a man of great personal attainments—a poet and a patron of poets, a scholar and a patron of scholars. He was almost completely free from the bonds that held other men of his day. He was entirely irreligious and purely secular in his interests and points of view. He had few morals, either public or private. Frederick not only kept a harem but he had Moslem ladies in it. When he went on a crusade, he promptly made friends with the Moslem foes of Christendom and obtained a highly advantageous peace without any fighting. All this deeply shocked and fascinated his contemporaries. In short, Frederick was an extremely versatile man with a colorful personality, who had a delightfully romantic and on the whole unfortunate career.

Although Frederick had promised Innocent III that he would give the crown of Sicily to one of his sons and keep its government separate from that of the empire and had renewed this promise several times thereafter, he could not bring himself to give up the land he loved. Yet he did make a genuine effort to
come to terms with the papacy. He returned to papal control the lands of central Italy that the pope claimed. But having made this concession he felt obliged to find other resources elsewhere in Italy and decided to attempt to bring Lombardy fully under imperial authority. This alarmed the pope almost as much as had his possession of central Italy. Even the enlarged papal states would be helpless if caught in a vise between Lombardy and Sicily firmly in the hands of a strong monarch. Naturally the Lombard towns also objected to losing the independence they had enjoyed for so long. Moreover, Frederick wanted no vague suzerainty. He extended to Lombardy the highly organized royal government that existed in his Sicilian kingdom. Soon his Sicilian officials were thoroughly hated throughout the land and the Lombard League was reformed. Hence, Frederick spent most of his reign in conflict with the papacy and the Lombard towns. It is useless to go over the contest in detail. It is a story of excommunications and absolutions, of overwhelming victories and crushing defeats. As long as he lived Frederick had the upper hand, but he never succeeded in crushing the Lombard League. When he died, his Italian lands fell into a confusion that was to last until the nineteenth century.

*The Policy of Frederick II in Germany*

Frederick’s sole interest in Germany was to keep it quiet so that it would not divert his attention from his Italian plans. After his final victory over Otto in
1214, he spent less than two years in his northern kingdom. His policy was to give the princes whatever they wanted to keep them contented. In a series of decrees he abandoned to them the last vestiges of imperial authority. The princes both lay and ecclesiastical were given full power of government in their lands and guaranteed against any form of royal interference. The rising towns that had long supported the monarchy were cheerfully abandoned to the mercy of the princes. Frederick's son Henry, who ruled in Germany for his father, did his best to check this dissolution of the royal power—he even rose in revolt against his father. But Henry's position was hopeless as long as Frederick supported the princes. The natural result of Frederick's policy was that the princes devoted their attention to building up their own states and took no interest in the emperor or the empire. When in the last years of his reign Frederick desperately needed German aid in Lombardy, the princes calmly did nothing.

The death of Frederick II marked the end of royal government in Germany and imperial government in the empire. The German monarchy became purely elective, with the power of the king depending on the extent and resources of his own princely estates. The monarchy had no organization, and the king's authority over the princes was almost entirely nominal. Some of these German kings were to gather armies, march to Rome, and receive the imperial crown. But at most
their authority in Italy was purely temporary. The great empire of the Hohenstaufens had become a vast maze of independent states.

Before leaving mediaeval Germany it is important to notice that the German kingdom of Frederick II was far larger than that ruled by the Salian kings. The eastward expansion of the Germans that had been halted in the tenth century got under way again in the early twelfth. The Emperor Lothar, his son-in-law Duke Henry of Saxony, and especially the latter's son Henry the Lion had pressed forward the conquest of the lands between the Elbe and the Oder. These princes had done more than subject the Slavs—they had opened the country to German colonization. The civil strife of the investiture contest had led to firm establishment of the manorial system in western Germany and many hardy men were anxious to migrate to new lands. These German colonists were excellent farmers who raised the value of the territory they settled. Hence, Slavic princes were as anxious to obtain them as were the German lords. When the boundary of Germany itself was pushed almost to the Oder, many Germans went on to settle in Bohemia and Poland. Thus while the Hohenstaufen kings were devoting their attention to Italy, the princes and people of Germany were expanding eastward. The mark of Brandenburg, a creation of this movement, was the nucleus of the modern Prussian state.