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A HISTORY OF THE ART OF WAR IN THE MIDDLE AGES

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ENGLAND BEFORE THE CONQUEST

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The old legionary cavalry wholly disappears,[1] and the commands of horse and foot are entirely separated. Yet under Constantine and his immediate successors the infantry still remained the more important arm, though the cavalry was continually growing in relative importance. When we read the pages of Ammianus Marcellinus, we still feel that the Roman armies whose campaigns he relates are the legitimate successors of the legions of Tiberius and Trajan, though the names of the corps and the titles of the officers are so greatly changed. In the last first-class victory which the house of Constantine won over the barbarians—Julian's great triumph over the South German tribes near Strassburg—it was the infantry which bore off the honours of the day. The cavalry were routed and driven off the field, but the foot-soldiery, though their flank was uncovered, formed the *testudo*, beat off the victorious German horse, and gained for their dispersed squadrons the time to rally and retrieve the day. (357 A.D.)

Nevertheless, we find the cavalry continually growing in relative numbers and importance. This is well marked by the fact that when Constantine displaced the old *Praefectus Praetorio* from his post as war-minister and commander-in-chief under the emperor, he replaced him, not by a single official, but by two—a *magister peditum* and a *magister equitum*. By the time of the drawing up of the *Notitia*, the number of the cavalry seems to have risen to about a third of that of the infantry, whereas in the old Roman armies it had often been but a tenth or a twelfth, and seldom rose to a sixth. The figures of the *Notitia* show the results of the battle of Adrianople, of whose military effects we have soon to speak. But long before 379 the horse were high in numbers and importance. The cause was twofold. The most obvious reason for the change was that there was an increasing need for rapidly moving troops. The Germans in the early fifth century generally aimed at plunder, not at conquest. Comparatively small bands of them slipped between the frontier posts, with the object of eluding pursuit, gathering booty, and then making their way homewards. It was as yet only occasionally that a whole tribe, or confederation of tribes, cut itself loose from its ancient seat, and marched with wife and child, flocks and herds and waggons, to win new lands within the Roman border. To

[1] But was apparently revived for a time later on; see Vegetius, i. 6.

hunt down and cut to pieces flitting bands of wary plunderers, the fully-armed legion or cohort was not a very efficient tool. The men marched with heavy loads, and were accompanied by a considerable baggage train; hence they could not, as a rule, catch the invaders. Cavalry, or very lightly-equipped infantry, alone were suitable for the task; the mailed legionaries were as ill-suited for it as were our own line-regiments to hunt down the Pindaris of the Deccan in the early nineteenth century.

But there was another reason for the increase in the numbers of the cavalry arm. The ascendency of the Roman infantry over its enemies was no longer so marked as in earlier ages, and it therefore required to be more strongly supported by cavalry than had been necessary in the first or second century. The Germans of the days of the dynasty of Constantine were no longer the half-armed savages of earlier times, who "without helm or mail, with weak shields of wicker-work, and armed only with the javelin,"[1] tried to face the embattled front of the cohort. Three hundred years of close contact with the empire had taught them much. Thousands of their warriors had served as Roman mercenaries, and brought home the fruits of experience. They had begun to employ defensive armour; among the frontier tribes the chiefs and the chosen warriors of their *comitatus* were now well equipped with mail-shirt and helmet. The rank and file bore iron-bound bucklers, pikes, the short stabbing sword (*scramasax*), as well as the long cutting sword (*spatha*), and among some races the deadly *francisca*, or battle-axe, which, whether thrown or wielded, would penetrate Roman armour and split the Roman shield. As weapons for hand-to-hand combat, these so far surpassed the old *framea* that the Imperial infantry found it no longer a light matter to defeat a German tribe. At the same time, there is no doubt that the *morale* of the Roman army was no longer what it had once been: the corps were less homogeneous; the recruits bought by the composition-money of the landholding classes were often of bad material; the proportion of auxiliaries drawn from beyond the frontier was too large. Nor can we doubt that the disasters of the third century had left their mark on the soldiery; the ancient belief in the invincibility of the Roman Empire and the majesty of the Roman name could no longer be held so firmly. Though seldom wanting in courage, the troops of the fourth

[1] See Tacitus, *Annals*, ii. 14.

century had lost the self-reliance and cohesion of the old Roman infantry, and required far more careful handling on the part of their generals.

The end of this transitional period was sudden and dreadful. The battle of Adrianople was the most crushing defeat suffered by a Roman army since Cannae—a slaughter to which it is most aptly compared by Ammianus Marcellinus. The Emperor Valens, all his chief officers,[1] and forty thousand men were left upon the field; indeed the army of the East was almost annihilated, and was never again its old self.

The military importance of Adrianople was unmistakable; it was a victory of cavalry over infantry. The Imperial army had developed its attack on the great *laager* in which the Goths lay encamped, arrayed in the time-honoured formation of Roman hosts—with the legions and cohorts in the centre, and the squadrons on the wings. The fight was raging hotly all along the barricade of waggons, when suddenly a great body of horsemen charged in upon the Roman left. It was the main strength of the Gothic cavalry, which had been foraging at a distance; receiving news of the fight, it had ridden straight for the battlefield, and fell upon the exposed flank of the Imperial host, "like a thunderbolt which strikes on a mountain top, and dashes away all that stands in its path."[2]

There was a considerable number of squadrons guarding the Roman flank; but they were caught unawares: some were ridden down and trampled under foot, the rest fled disgracefully. Then the Gothic horsemen swept down on the infantry of the left wing, rolled it up, and drove it in upon the centre and reserve. So tremendous was their impact, that the legions and cohorts were pushed together in helpless confusion. Every attempt to stand firm failed, and in a few minutes left, centre, and reserve were one undistinguishable mass. Imperial guards, light troops, lancers, auxiliaries and legions of the line were wedged together in a press that grew closer every moment, for the Gothic infantry burst out from its line of waggons, and attacked from the front, the moment that it saw the Romans dashed into confusion by the attack from the flank. The cavalry on Valens' right wing saw that the day was lost, and

[1] The grand masters of the infantry and cavalry, the count of the palace, and thirty-five commanders of corps of horse or foot.

[2] Ammianus, xxi. 12.

rode off without another effort, followed in disorder by such of the infantry corps on that side of the field as were not too heavily engaged to be able to retire. Then the abandoned foot-soldiery of the main body realised the horror of their position: beset in flank and rear by the horsemen, and in front by the mass which had sallied forth from the Gothic *laager*, they were equally unable to deploy or to fly, and had to stand to be cut down. It was a sight such as had been seen once before at Cannae, and was to be seen once again, on a smaller scale, at Roosbeke. Men could not raise their arms to strike a blow, so closely were they packed; spears snapped right and left, their bearers being unable to lift them to a vertical position; many soldiers were stifled in the press. Into this quivering mass the Goths rode, plying lance and sword against the helpless enemy. It was not till two-thirds of the Roman army had fallen, that the thinning of the ranks and the approach of night enabled a few thousand men to break out, and follow the fugitives of the right wing in their flight southward. (378.)

Such was the battle of Adrianople, the first great victory won by that heavy cavalry which had now shown its ability to supplant the heavy infantry of Rome as the ruling power of war. During their sojourn on the steppes of South Russia, the Goths, first of all Teutonic races, had come to place their main reliance on their horsemen. Dwelling in the Ukraine, they had felt the influence of that land, ever the nurse of cavalry from the day of the Scythian to that of the Tartar and Cossack. They had come to consider it more honourable to fight on horse than on foot, and every chief was followed by his squadron of sworn companions. Driven against their will into conflict with the empire, whose protection they had originally sought as a shelter against the oncoming Huns, they found themselves face to face with the army that had so long held the barbarian world in check. The first fighting about Marcianopolis and Ad Salices in 377 was bloody, but inconclusive. Then, when Valens had gathered all the forces of the East for a decisive battle, the day of judgment arrived. The shock came, and, probably to his own surprise, the Goth found that his stout lance and his good steed would carry him through the serried ranks of the Imperial infantry. He had become the arbiter of war, the lineal ancestor of all the knights of the Middle Ages, the inaugurator of that ascendency of the horsemen which was to endure for a thousand years.

CHAPTER I

THE VISIGOTHS, LOMBARDS, AND FRANKS

WHEN we leave the discussion of the military art of the later Romans, and pass on to investigate that of the Teutonic kingdoms which were built upon the ruins of the Western Empire, we are stepping from a region of comparative light into one of doubt and obscurity. If, in spite of our possessing military manuals like that of Vegetius, official statistics such as the *Notitia Dignitatum*, and histories written by able soldiers like Ammianus and Procopius, we still find difficult points in the Roman art of war, what can we expect when our sole literary material in Western Europe consists of garrulous or jejune chronicles written by Churchmen, a few fragments of ancient poems, and a dozen codes of Teutonic laws? To draw up from our fragmentary authorities an estimate of the strategical importance of the Persian campaigns of Heraclius is not easy; but to discover what were the particular military causes which settled the event of the day at Testry or the Guadelete, at Deorham or the Heavenfield, is absolutely impossible. We can for some centuries do little more than give the history of military institutions, arms, and armour, with an occasional side-light on tactics. Often the contemporary chronicles will be of less use to us than stray notices in national codes or songs, the quaint drawings of illuminated manuscripts, or the mouldering fragments found in the warrior's barrow.

It is fortunate that the general characteristics of the period render its military history very simple. By the sixth century the last survivals of Roman military skill had disappeared in the West. No traces remained of it but the clumsily-patched walls of the great cities. Of strategy there could be little in an age when men strove to win their ends by hard fighting rather than by skilful operations or the utilising of extraneous

advantages. Tactics were stereotyped by the national organisations of the various peoples. The true interest of the centuries of the early Middle Ages lies in the gradual evolution of new forms of military efficiency, which end in the establishment of a military caste as the chief power in war, and in the decay among most races of the old system which made the tribe arrayed in arms the normal fighting force. Intimately connected with this change was an alteration in arms and equipment, which transformed the outward appearance of war in a manner not less complete. The period of transition may be considered to end in the eleventh century, when the feudal knight had established his superiority over all descriptions of troops pitted against him, from the Magyar horse-bowmen of the East to the Danish axemen of the North. The fight of Hastings, the last notable attempt of unaided infantry to withstand cavalry in Western Europe for two hundred years, serves to mark the termination of the epoch.

The Teutonic kingdoms which were founded in the fifth century within the limits of the Western Empire were some of them established by races accustomed to fight on horseback, some by races accustomed to fight on foot. All the tribes which had their original habitat in the plains beyond the Danube and north of the Euxine seem to have learned horsemanship: such were the Goths, both Eastern and Western, the Lombards, Gepidae, and Heruli. The races, on the other hand, which had started from the marshes of the Lower Rhine or the moors of North Germany and Scandinavia were essentially foot-soldiery; the Franks, Saxons, Angles, and Northmen were none of them accustomed to fight on horseback. The sharp division between these two groups of peoples is all the more curious because many tribes in each group had been in close contact with the Romans for several centuries, and it might have been expected that all would have learned a similar lesson from the empire. Such, however, was not the case: the Franks of the fifth century, though their ancestors the Chamavi and Chatti had been for four hundred years serving the Romans as auxiliaries when they were not fighting them as enemies, seem singularly uninfluenced by their mighty neighbours; while the Goths under similar conditions had profoundly modified their armament and customs.

CHAPTER I

CHARLES THE GREAT AND THE EARLY CAROLINGIANS (A.D. 768–850)

THE accession of Charles the Great serves to mark the commencement of a new epoch in the art of war, as in most other spheres of human activity in Western Europe. In our second book we had to describe the military customs of Frank and Goth, Lombard and Saxon, in separate sections. The conquests of Charles combined all the kingdoms of the Teutonic West into a single State, with the exception of England and the obscure Visigothic survival in the Asturias. Races which had hitherto been in but slight contact with each other are for the future subjected to the same influences, placed under the same masters, and guided towards the same political ends. The rescripts of Charles were received with the same obedience at Pavia and Paderborn, at Barcelona and Regensburg. For the first time since the fall of the West-Roman Empire the same organisation was imposed on all the peoples from the Ebro to the Danube. The homogeneity which his long reign imposed upon all the provinces of Western Europe was never entirely lost, even when his dynasty had disappeared and his realm had fallen asunder into half a dozen independent States. In the history of the art of war this fact is as clear as in that of law, literature, or art. In spite of all national divergences, there is for the future a certain obvious similarity in the development of all the Western peoples.

We have pointed out that under the later Merovings and the great Mayors of the Palace the Franks were showing a decided tendency towards the adoption of armour and the development of cavalry service. It is under Charles the Great that this tendency receives a definite sanction from the royal authority,

and, ceasing to be voluntary, becomes a matter of law and compulsion. At the same time some attempt is made to render the old Frankish levy *en masse* more efficient, by making definite provision for its sustenance and cutting down its numbers and improving its quality. We now find a system under which the universal liability to service remains, but the individuals on whom the *hereban* falls are made to combine into small groups, each bound to furnish one well-armed man to the host; so that a single efficient warrior is substituted for two, three, or six ill-equipped peasants.

The reasons which led to the reforms of the great Charles are not hard to seek. Under the later Merovings the Franks were barely able to maintain their own borders: their usual foes were the Saxon, Frisian, and Bavarian: expeditions against Spain and Italy had almost ceased. This period of decay and unending civil wars was brought to a sudden close by the onslaughts of the Saracens in 725–732: Charles Martel had fortunately come to the front just in time to save the State. The next forty years were a period of aggressive wars against the Saracen, the Lombard, and the Saxon. Both Saracens and Lombards were horse-soldiery, and we cannot doubt that in the wars with King Aistulf and the Emirs of Spain the Franks were led to develop their cavalry in order to cope with their enemies. They obtained such marked success against each of their adversaries, that we cannot doubt that their mounted men were growing more numerous and more efficient than they had been in the seventh century.

But Charles the Great undertook offensive wars on a much larger scale than Pepin and Charles Martel. His armies went so far afield, and the regions which he subdued were so broad, that the old Frankish levy *en masse* would have been far too slow and clumsy a weapon for him. An army of Neustrian and Austrasian infantry could hardly have hunted the Avars on the plains of the Theiss and the Middle Danube. The Frankish realm had been so vastly enlarged that it extended, not as of old from Utrecht to Toulouse, but from Hamburg to Barcelona. To keep this mighty empire in obedience a more quickly-moving force was required; hence Charles did his best to increase the number of his horse-soldiery. It was also incumbent on him to raise the proportion of mailed men in his host: against the well-armoured Lombard and Saracen, and later against the

horse-bowmen of the Avars, troops serving without helm and byrnie were at a great disadvantage.

The first ordinance bearing on military matters in the Capitularies of Charles the Great is one showing his anxiety to keep as much armour as possible within the realm. In 779 he orders that no merchant shall dare to export byrnies from the realm. This order was repeated again and again in later years, in the *Capitula Minora*, cap. 7,[1] and again in the Aachen Capitulary of 805; the trade in arms with the Wends and Avars is especially denounced in the last-named document.[2] Any merchant caught conveying a mail-shirt outside the realm is sentenced to the forfeiture of all his property.

In the first half of his reign Charles issued a good deal of military legislation for his newly-conquered Lombard subjects. He imposed upon them the Frankish regulations on military service, which made the fine for neglecting the king's "ban" sixty solidi,—the old Ripuarian valuation of the offence,—and the penalty for desertion in the field, "which the Franks call *heresliscs*," death, or at least to be placed at the king's mercy both for life and property.[3] It is interesting to find in the Lombardic Capitulary of 786 that the Lombards who are to swear obedience to the royal mandates are defined as cavalry one and all, being described as "those of the countryside, or men of the counts, bishops, and abbots, or tenants on royal demesne, or on Church property, all who hold fiefs, or serve as vassals under a lord, all those who come to the host with horse and arms, shield, lance, sword, and dagger."[4] The possession of this mass of Lombard horsemen was of the greatest importance to Charles in his wars with the Avars. Nearly all the fighting against these wild horse-bowmen was done by the Lombards, under Pepin, the king's son, whom he had made his vicegerent in Italy. It was a Lombard host which in 790 pushed forward into the heart of Pannonia, beat the Avars in the open field, and stormed their camp. The slow-moving Austrasians meanwhile had only wasted the Avaric borders as far as the Raab. A few years later it was again the Lombard horsemen who practically made an end of the Avaric power: under Pepin and Eric Duke of Friuli they captured the great "Ring," or royal encampment of the Chagan, hard by the Theiss, and sent its spoils, the

[1] *Cap. Min.* § 7: "Ut bauga et bruniae non dentur negociatoribus."
[2] *Cap. Aquisg.* § 7. [3] *Cap. Ticinense*, § 3. [4] *Cap. Langobardiae* of 786, § 7.

accumulation of two centuries of plunder, to deck the halls of Aachen. The Avars never raised their heads again, and fell into decrepitude. If he had led only Frankish infantry levies, Charles would never have been able to subdue this race of nomad horsemen: the numerous Lombard knights, however, could both pursue them and ride them down when caught. It is interesting to note how the strong domineering spirit of the great king inspired his new subjects to undertake and carry out an adventure which their own kings had never been able to achieve, for the Avar raids had been a scourge to Friuli and Lombardic "Austria" for two centuries, and no remedy had been found against them.

The chief military ordinances of Charles the Great are five rescripts dating from the later years of his reign—the *Capitulare de Exercitu Promovendo* of 803, the *Capitulare Aquisgranense* of 805, the later edicts issued from the same city in 807 and 813, and the *Capitulare Bononiense* of 811. All these deserve careful study.

The first of them, the edict of 803, is directed towards the substitution of a smaller but better-armed force for the old general levy. It ordains that the great vassals must take to the field as many as possible of the retainers whom they have enfeoffed on their land (*homines casati*). A count may leave behind only two of his men to guard his wife, and two more to discharge his official functions. A bishop may leave only two altogether.[1] Secondly, a new arrangement is made as to the field service of all Franks holding land. Everyone who owns four *mansi*,[2] or over, must march himself under his lord, if his lord is serving on the expedition,—under his local count if the lord be busy elsewhere. To every man who owns three *mansi* there shall be added another who has but one, and these two shall settle between them for the service of one man properly equipped: if the wealthier goes himself, the poorer shall pay one-fourth of his equipment; if the poorer goes, the wealthier shall be responsible for three-fourths. Similarly, all men owning two *mansi* are to be arranged in pairs: one is to march, the other to provide half the equipment. And so, again, holders of one *mansus* are to be arranged in groups of four: one will go forth, the other three will each be responsible for one-

[1] *Cap. de Exercitu Promovendo*, § 4.

[2] Cf. the English enactment about the man with five hides or over, on p. 109.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

IN studying the Crusades we have seen the military art of the nations of Western Europe at its best and its worst. Nowhere are more reckless displays of blind courage, or more stupid neglect of the elementary rules of strategy and tactics to be found, than in the great expeditions to the Levant. On the other hand, we have also had to observe among the more capable leaders of the crusading armies a far higher degree of intelligent generalship than was usual among their contemporaries in the West. If the Crusades of 1101 and 1147 are decidedly more distressing to the critic than the average wars of France, England, or Germany, there are also battles and campaigns —such as that of Arsouf—which show very favourably beside those of the lands nearer home. Many of the Crusaders seem to have been at their best when facing the new problems of the East. Richard Coeur de Lion at Acre, Arsouf, and Jaffa rises far above his ordinary level: we find ourselves wondering how the very capable general of 1190–91 can on his return waste so much energy and ability to no purpose in the wretched peddling French wars of 1194–99. We may add that the great Frederic I. of Germany never shows to such good effect in his home campaigns as in the conduct of his expedition through Asia Minor. Many of the lesser figures of the Crusades, including the good Godfrey of Bouillon himself, are obscure and undistinguished in the wars of their native lands, and only show the stuff that is in them when they have crossed the high seas.

The worst military errors of the Christians in the East came, as we have seen, from their gross ignorance of the conditions of warfare in Syria or Asia Minor, and of the tactics of the enemies with whom they had to deal. At home leaders and led alike were safe from such dangers since they knew the military

character and usages of their neighbours, and had some rough idea of the geography, climate, and productions of their neighbours' territory. But if this knowledge preserved them from certain dangers, it seems, on the other hand, that in the familiar border wars of the West the best qualities of a commander were often not developed. It is new and unforeseen dangers and difficulties that test most adequately the stuff that is in a man.

When we turn from the history of the Crusades to consider the contemporary history of the Art of War in Western Europe, the first thing that strikes us is the comparatively small influence which the great campaigns in the Levant seem to have had upon the development of strategy and tactics at home. Tens of thousands of barons, knights, and sergeants came back as veterans from the East, and one would expect to see the lessons which they had learned in fighting the Turk and Syrian perpetually applied to the wars of their native countries. Yet it is by no means easy to point out obvious instances of such application of new principles of war, save in the provinces of fortification and of arms and armour. In strategy and tactics it is difficult to detect from a broad survey much direct influence flowing from the Crusades.

We may take as the clearest example of this the entire neglect by the Western nations of the most important tactical lesson of the Crusades. We have shown by a score of examples that the one great principle which settled the fate of wars with the Turk was that generals who properly combined infantry and cavalry in their line of battle were successful, and that generals who tried to dispense with the support of foot-soldiery always failed disastrously. The fact that the combination of the two arms is better than simple reliance on one had been shown at Hastings long ere the Crusades began, but the lesson was even more clearly visible in the details of such fights as Antioch or Ascalon as compared with the disasters of 1101 or the narrow escape from destruction at Dorylæum.

We should expect, therefore, to find that the return home of the warriors of the first Crusade would be followed by the development of a rational use of infantry and cavalry in close alliance and interdependence. But we find little of the kind: over the greater part of Western and Central Europe the cavalry arm still maintains its exclusive predominance, and infantry is still despised and distrusted. In Italy, it is true, the

workings of the experience of the Crusades are to be recognised in the sudden growth of the popularity of the crossbow, and probably also in the increased importance of the civic infantry. But in the only other parts of Europe where foot-soldiery show to any effect—England and the Netherlands—we are dealing with an old Teutonic survival, not with any new development.

In many of the twelfth-century battles of Western Europe, when by some rare exception we do find combatants on foot entrusted with a principal part in the fight, we discover on closer inquiry that they are not ordinary foot-soldiery, but knights who have dismounted in order to carry out some desperate duty. We are, in short, merely witnessing a recurrence to that ancient habit of the Teutonic races which Leo the Wise had described two hundred years before.[1] Such instances are to be found on the part of the English and the Normans at Tenchebrai[2] (1106), and again at the first battle of Lincoln[3] (1146), where both King Stephen and the rebel earls dismounted the pick of their knights to form a solid reserve. The same is the case in the English army at Bremûle (1119), and at the battle of the Standard[4] (1138), where the Yorkshire knights left their horses and joined the yeomanry of the fyrd in order to stiffen the mass when it was about to be assailed by the wild rush of the Scots. The Emperor Conrad's German chivalry behaved in a similar way at the chief combat during the siege of Damascus in 1148.

Such expedients, however, are exceptional. On the other hand, we not unfrequently find battles in which neither side brought any foot-soldiery to the field, such as Thielt (1128), Tagliacozzo (1268), and the Marchfeld (1278). Cases where one side had no infantry whatever in the battle line are still more numerous. Such are Bremûle (1119), Legnano (1176), Muret (1274).

When true infantry are engaged on both sides, it is rare to find them actually settling the fate of the day. Generally they are only used as a very subsidiary force, employed merely for skirmishing and not for the decisive charge. The main exceptions to this rule are to be found, as we shall have to show later on, in Italy and the Netherlands. But if the infantry in most battles had no great part in the winning of the day, they were often the chief sufferers in a defeat. As a rule, those

[1] See p. 204. [2] See p. 381. [3] See p. 396. [4] See p. 390.

of the beaten army were fearfully mishandled by the knights of the victorious side. When the day was won, the infantry of the vanquished party were nearly always cut to pieces in the most ruthless manner, while their countrymen of the knightly classes were not slaughtered, but reserved for ransom.

The mailed horseman, then, maintains his place as the chief factor in battle down to the end of the thirteenth century, and the main features of the two hundred years from Hastings onward are the feudal knight and the feudal castle. We shall have to note that while tactics and strategy make comparatively small and slow progress in these two centuries, the art of fortification grows very rapidly. Between the simple castle of the time of William I. and the splendid and complicated fortresses of the end of the thirteenth century there is an enormous gap. The methods of attack made no corresponding advance, and by 1300 the defensive had obtained an almost complete mastery over the offensive, so that famine was the only certain weapon in siegecraft. It is not till the introduction of cannon and gunpowder in the fourteenth century that the tables begin to be turned.

In chapter iii. of Book III. we dealt with the origin and evolution of the feudal knight and the feudal castle. We have now to treat of their further developments.