









Section IV

REIGNS OF LEO IV THE KHAZAR, CONSTANTINE VI AND IRENE,

AD 775-802

Leo IV succeeded his father at the age of twenty-five. His mother, Irene, was the daughter of the emperor or *chagan* of the Khazars, then a powerful people, through whose territories the greater part of the commercial intercourse between the Christians and the rich countries in eastern Asia was carried on. Leo inherited from his mother a mild and amiable disposition; nor does he appear to have been destitute of some portion of his father's talents, but the state of his health prevented him from displaying the same activity. His reign lasted four years and a half, and his administration was conducted in strict accordance with the policy of his father and grandfather; but the weak state of his health kept the public attention fixed on the question of the imperial succession.

Constantine V had selected an Athenian lady, of great beauty and accomplishments, named Irene, to be his son's wife, and Leo had a son named Constantine, who was born in the year 771. The indefinite nature of the imperial succession, and the infancy of Leo's child, gave the two half-brothers of the emperor, who had been invested by their father with the rank of Caesar, some hope of ascending the throne on their brother's death.

Leo conferred on his infant son the title of Emperor, in order to secure his succession; and this was done in a more popular manner than usual, at the express desire of the senate, in order to give the ceremony all the character of a popular election. The young emperor's five uncles—the two Caesars, and the three who tore the title of *Nobilissimi*—were compelled to take the same oath of allegiance as the other subjects. Yet, shortly after this, the Caesar Nicephorus formed a conspiracy to render himself master of the government. Leo, who felt that he was rapidly sinking into the grave, referred the decision of his brother's guilt to a *Silention*, which condemned all the conspirators to death. Nicephorus was pardoned, but his partisans were scourged and banished to Cherson. The death of Leo IV happened on the 8th of September, 780.

Constantine was ten years old when his father died, so that the whole direction of the empire devolved on his mother, Irene, who had received the imperial crown from Constantine V; for that emperor seems to have felt that the weak state of Leo's health would require the assistance of Irene's talents. The virtues Irene had displayed in a private station were insufficient to resist the corrupting influence of irresponsible power. Ambition took possession of her own soul, and it was the ambition of reigning alone, not of reigning well. The education of her son was neglected —perhaps as a means of securing her power; favor was avowedly a surer road to preferment than long service, so that the court became a scene of political intrigue, and personal motives decided most public acts. As no organ of public opinion possessed the power of awakening a sense of moral responsibility among the officers of state, the intrigues of the court ended in conspiracies, murder, and treason.

The parties struggling for power, soon ranged themselves under the banners of the ecclesiastical factions that had long divided the empire. Little, probably, did many of the leaders care what party they espoused in the religious question; but it was necessary to proclaim themselves members of an ecclesiastical faction in order to secure a popular following. The Empress Irene was known to favor image-worship; as a woman and a Greek, this was natural; yet policy would have dictated to her to adopt that party as the most certain manner of securing support powerful enough to counterbalance the family influence of the Isaurian dynasty, which was now wielded by the uncles of the young emperor.

The conflict between the image-worshippers and the Iconoclasts soon commenced. The Caesar

Nicephorus, who was as ambitious as his sister-in-law, was eager to drive her from the regency. He organized a conspiracy, in which several ministers and members of the senate took part. Irene obtained full proof of all its ramifications before the conspirators were prepared to act, seized her five brothers-in-law, and compelled them to enter the priesthood. In order to make it generally known that they had assumed the sacerdotal character, they were obliged to officiate during the Christmas ceremonies at the high altar of St Sophia's, while the young emperor and his mother restored to the church the rich jewels of which it had been deprived by the Iconoclast emperors. The intendant-general of posts, the general of the Armeniac theme, the commander of the imperial guard, and the admiral of the Archipelago, who had all taken part in the conspiracy, were scourged, and immured as monks in distant monasteries. Helpidioss the governor of Sicily, assumed the title of emperor as soon as he found that his participation in the plot was known at court; but he was compelled to seek shelter among the Saracens, in whose armies he afterwards served. Nicephorus Doukas, another conspirator, fled also to the Mohammedans. Some years later, when Constantine VI had assumed the government into his own hands, a new conspiracy was formed by the partisans of his uncles (AD 792). The princes were then treated with great severity. The Caesar Nicephorus was deprived of sight; and the tongues of the others were cut out, by the order of their nephew, not long before he lost his own eyes by the order of his mother.

Irene Regent. AD 780-790

The influence of the clergy in the ordinary administration of justice, and the great extent to which ecclesiastical legislation regulated civil rights, rendered councils of the church an important feature in those forms and usages that practically circumscribed the despotic power of the emperor by a framework of customs, opinions, and convictions which he could with difficulty alter, and rarely oppose without danger. The political ambition of Irene, the national vanity of the Greeks, and the religious feelings of the orthodox, required the sanction of a constitutional public authority, before the laws against image-worship could be openly repealed. The Byzantine Empire had at this time an ecclesiastical, though not a political constitution. The will of the sovereign was alone insufficient to change an organic law, forming part of the ecclesiastical administration of the empire. It was necessary to convoke a general council to legalize image-worship; and to render such a council a fit instrument for the proposed revolution, much arrangement was necessary. No person was ever endued with greater talents for removing opposition and conciliating personal support than the empress.

The Patriarch Paul, a decided Iconoclast, was induced to resign, and declare that he repented of his hostility to image-worship, because it had cut off the church of Constantinople from communion with the rest of the Christian world. This declaration pointed out the necessity of holding a general council, in order to establish that communion. The crisis required a new Patriarch, of stainless character, great ability, and perfect acquaintance with the party connections and individual characters of the leading bishops. No person could be selected from among the dignitaries of the church, who had been generally appointed by Iconoclast emperors. The choice of Irene fell on a civilian. Tarasios, the chief secretary of the imperial cabinet—a man of noble birth, considerable popularity, and a high reputation for learning and probity—was suddenly elevated to be the head of the Greek church, and allowed to be not unworthy of the high rank.

The orthodox would probably have raised a question concerning the legality of nominating a layman, had it not been evident that the objection would favor the interests of their opponents.

The empress and her advisers were not bold enough to venture on an irretrievable declaration in favor of image-worship, until they had obtained a public assurance of popular support. An assembly of the inhabitants of the capital was convoked in the palace of Magnaura, in order to secure a majority pledged to the cause of Tarasios. The fact that such an assembly was considered necessary, is a strong proof that the strength of the rival parties was very nearly balanced, and that this manifestation of public opinion was required in order to relieve the empress from personal responsibility. Irene proposed to the assembly that Tarasios should be elected, Patriarch, and the proposal was received with general acclamation. Tarasios, however, refused the dignity, declaring that he would not accept the Patriarchate unless a general council should be convoked, for restoring unity to the church. The convocation of a council was adopted, and the nomination of Tarasios ratified. Though great care had been taken to fill this assembly with image-worshippers, nevertheless several dissentient voices made themselves heard, protesting against the proceedings as an attack on the existing legislation of the empire.

The Iconoclasts were still strong in the capital, and the opposition of the soldiery was excited by the determination of Tarasios to reestablish image-worship. They openly declared that they

would not allow a council of the church to be held, nor permit the ecclesiastics of their party to be unjustly treated by the court. More than one tumult warned the empress that no council could be held at Constantinople. It was found necessary to disperse the Iconoclastic soldiery in distant provinces, and form new cohorts of guards devoted to the court, before any steps could be publicly taken to change the laws of the church. The experience of Tarasios as a minister of state was more useful to Irene during the first period of his patriarchate than his theological learning. It required nearly three years to smooth the way for the meeting of the council, which was at length held at Nicaea, in September, 787. Three hundred and sixty-seven members attended, of whom, however, not a few were abbots and monks, who assumed the title of confessors from having been ejected from their monasteries by the decrees of the Iconoclast sovereigns. Some of the persons present deserve to be particularly mentioned, for they have individually conferred greater benefits on mankind by their learned labors, than they rendered to Christianity by their zealous advocacy of image-worship in this council The secretary of the two commissioners who represented the imperial authority was Nicephorus the historian, subsequently Patriarch of Constantinople. His sketch of the history of the empire, from the year 602 to 770, is a valuable work, and indicates that he was a man of judgment, whenever his perceptions were not obscured by theological and ecclesiastical prejudices. Two other eminent Byzantine writers were also present. George, called Syncellus, from the office he held, under the Patriarch Tarasios. He has left us a chronological work, which has preserved the knowledge of many important facts recorded by no other ancient authority. Theophanes, the friend and companion of the Syncellus, has continued this work; and his Chronography of Roman and Byzantine history, with all its faults, forms the best picture of the condition of the empire that we possess for a long period. Theophanes enjoyed the honor of becoming, at a later day, a confessor in the cause of image-worship; he was exiled from a monastery which he had founded, and died in the island of Samothrace, AD 817.

The second council of Nicaea had no better title than the Iconoclast council of Constantinople to be regarded as a general council of the church. The Pope Hadrian, indeed, sent deputies from the Latin Church; but the churches of Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch, whose patriarchs were groaning under the government of the caliphs, did not dare to communicate with foreign authorities. An attempt was nevertheless made to deceive the world into a belief that they were represented, by allowing two monks from Palestine to present themselves as the *syncelli* of these patriarchs, without scrutinizing the validity of their credentials. Pope Hadrian, though he sent deputies, wrote at the same time to Tarasios, making several demands tending to establish the ecclesiastical supremacy of the papal See, and complaining in strong terms that the Patriarch of Constantinople had no right to assume the title of *ecumenic*. The hope of recovering the estates of the patrimony of St. Peter in the Byzantine provinces, which had been sequestrated by Leo III, and of re-establishing the supremacy of the See of Rome, made Hadrian overlook much that was offensive to papal pride.

The second council of Nicaea authorized the worship of images as an orthodox practice. Forged passages, pretending to be extracts from the earlier fathers, and genuine from the more modern, were quoted in favor of the practice. Simony was already a prevailing evil in the Greek Church. Many of the bishops had purchased their sees, and most of these naturally preferred doing violence to their opinions rather than lose their revenues. From this cause, unanimity was easily obtained by court influence. The council decided, that not only was the cross an object of reverence, but also that the images of Christ, and the pictures of the Virgin Mary—of angels, and holy men, whether painted in colors, or worked in embroidery in sacred ornaments, or formed in mosaic in the walls of churches—were all lawful objects of worship. At the same time, in order to guard against the accusation of idolatry, it was declared that the worship of an image, which is merely a sign of reverence, must not be confounded with the adoration due only to God. The council of Constantinople held in 754 was declared heretical, and all who maintained its doctrines, and condemned the use of images, were anathematized. The patriarchs Anastasios, Constantinos, and Niketas were especially doomed to eternal condemnation.

The Pope adopted the decrees of this council, but he refused to confirm them officially, because the empress delayed restoring the estates of St. Peter's patrimony. In the countries of Western Europe which had formed parts of the Western Empire, the superstitions of the image-worshippers were viewed with as much dissatisfaction as the fanaticism of the Iconoclasts; and the council of Nicaea was as much condemned as that of Constantinople by a large body of enlightened ecclesiastics. The public mind in the West was almost as much divided as in the East; and if a general council of the Latin Church had been assembled, its unbiassed decisions would probably have been at variance with those supported by the Pope and the council of Nicaea.

Charlemagne published a refutation of the doctrines of this council on the subject of image-worship. His work, called the Caroline Books, consists of four parts, and was certainly composed under his immediate personal superintendence, though he was doubtless incapable of writing it

himself. At all events, it was published as his composition. This work condemns the superstitious bigotry of the Greek image-worshippers in a decided manner, while at the same time it only blames the misguided zeal of the Iconoclasts. Altogether it is a very remarkable production, and gives a more correct idea of the extent to which Roman civilization still survived, in Western society, and counterbalanced ecclesiastical influence, than any other contemporary document. In 794 Charlemagne assembled a council of three hundred bishops at Frankfort; and, in the presence of the papal legates, this council maintained that pictures ought to be placed in churches, but that they should not be worshipped, but only regarded with respect, as recalling more vividly to the mind the subjects represented. The similarity existing at this time in the opinions of enlightened men throughout the whole Christian world must be noted as a proof that general communications and commercial intercourse still pervaded society with common sentiments. The dark night of medieval ignorance and local prejudices had not yet settled on the West; nor had feudal anarchy confined the ideas and wants of society to the narrow sphere of provincial interests. The aspect of public opinion alarmed Pope Hadrian, whose interests required that the relations of the West and East should not become friendly. His position, however, rendered him more suspicious of Constantine and Irene, in spite of their orthodoxy, than of Charlemagne, with all his heterodox ideas. The Frank monarch, though he differed in ecclesiastical opinions, was sure to be a political protector. The Pope consequently labored to foment the jealousy that reigned between the Frank and Byzantine governments concerning Italy, where the commercial relations of the Greeks still counterbalanced the military influence of the Franks. When writing to Charlemagne, he accused the Greeks and their Italian partisans of every crime likely to arouse the hostility of the Franks. They were reproached, and not unjustly, with carrying on an extensive trade in slaves, who were purchased in Western Europe, and sold, to the Saracens. The Pope knew well that this commerce was carried on in all the trading cities of the West, both by Greeks and Latins; for slaves then constituted the principal article of European export to Africa, Syria, and Egypt, in payment of the produce of the East, which was brought from those countries. The Pope seized and burned some Greek vessels at Centumcellae, (Civita-Vecchia), because the crews were accused of kidnapping the people of the neighborhood. The violent expressions of Hadrian, in speaking of the Greeks, could not fail to produce a great effect in Western Europe, where the letters of the Popes formed the literary productions most generally read and studied by all ranks. His calumnies must have sunk deep into the public mind, and tended to impress on Western nations that aversion to the Greeks, which was subsequently increased by mercantile jealousy and religious strife.

End of Byzantine Authority at Rome. AD 800

The extinction of the last traces of the supremacy of the Eastern Empire at Rome was the most gratifying result of their machinations to the Popes. On Christmas-day, AD 800, Charlemagne revived the existence of the Western Empire, and received the imperial crown from Pope Leo III in the church of St. Peter's. Hitherto the Frank monarch had acknowledged a titular supremacy in the Eastern Empire, and had borne the title of Patrician of the Roman Empire, as a mark of dignity conferred on him by the emperors of Constantinople; but he now raised himself to an equality with the emperors of the East, by assuming the title of Emperor of the West. The assumption of the title of emperor of the Romans was not an act of idle vanity. Roman usages, Roman prejudices, and Roman law still exercised a powerful influence over the minds of the most numerous body of Charlemagne's subjects; and by all the clergy and lawyers throughout his dominions the rights and prerogatives of the Roman emperors of the West were held to be legally vested in his person by the fact of his election, such as it was, and his coronation by the Pope. The political allegiance of the Pope to the emperor, which was then undisputed, became thus transferred from the emperor of the East to the emperor of the West as a matter of course; while the papal rights of administration over the former exarchate of Ravenna, the Pentapolis, and the dukedom of Rome, acquired, under the protection of the Franks, the character of a decided sovereignty. Many towns of Italy at this time acquired a degree of municipal independence which made them almost independent republics. The influence of Roman law in binding society together, the military weakness of the papal power, and the rapid decline of the central authority in the empire of the Franks, enabled these towns to perpetuate their peculiar constitutions and independent jurisdictions down to the French Revolution.

A female regency in an absolute government must always render the conduct of public affairs liable to be directed by court intrigues. When Irene wished to gain Charlemagne as an ally, in order to deprive the Iconoclasts of any hope of foreign assistance, she had negotiated a treaty of marriage between her son and Rotrud, the eldest daughter of the Frank monarch, *AD* 781. But when the question of image-worship was settled, she began to fear that this alliance might become the means

of excluding her from power, and she then broke off the treaty, and compelled her son to marry a Paphlagonian lady of the court named Maria, whom the young emperor soon regarded with aversion. Constantine, however, submitted quietly to his mother's domination until his twentieth year. He then began to display dissatisfaction at the state of tutelage in which he was held, and at his complete seclusion from public business. A plan was formed by many leading men in the administration to place him at the head of affairs, but it was discovered before it was ripe for execution. Irene on this occasion displayed unseemly violence, in her eagerness to retain a power she ought immediately to have resigned. The conspirators were seized, scourged, and banished. When her son was conducted into her presence, she struck him, and overwhelmed him with reproaches and insults. The young emperor was then confined so strictly in the palace that all communication with his friends was cut off.

This unprincipled conduct of the regent-mother became the object of general reprobation. The troops of the Armeniac theme refused to obey her orders, and marched to the capital to deliver Constantine. On the way they were joined by other legions, and Irene found herself compelled to release her son, who immediately hastened to the advancing army. A total revolution was effected at court. The ministers and creatures of Irene were removed from office, and some who had displayed particular animosity against Constantine were scourged and beheaded. Constantine ruled the empire for about six years, (790-797). But his education had been neglected, in a disgraceful manner, and his mind was perhaps naturally fickle. Though he displayed the courage of his family at the head of his army, his incapacity for business, and his inconstancy in his friendships, soon lost him the support of his most devoted partisans. He lost his popularity by putting out the eyes of his uncle, Nicephorus, and cutting out the tongues of his four uncles, who were accused of having taken part in the plots of their brother. He alienated the attachment of the Armenian troops by putting out the eyes of their general, Alexis Mouselen, who had been the means of delivering him from confinement. The folly of this last act was even greater than the ingratitude, for it was done to gratify the revengeful feelings of his mother. These acts of folly, cruelty, and ingratitude destroyed his influence, and induced his sincerest friends to make their peace with Irene, whom it was evident her son would ultimately allow to rule the empire.

Constantine VI Divorces Maria. Opposition of the Monks

The unhappy marriage into which Constantine had been forced by his mother, she at last converted into the cause of his ruin. The emperor fell in love with Theodota, one of his mother’s maids of honor, and determined to divorce Maria in order to marry her. Irene, whose ambition induced her to stoop to the basest intrigues, battered him in this project, as it seemed likely to increase her influence and ruin his reputation. The Empress Maria was induced to retire into a monastery, and the emperor expected to be able to celebrate his marriage with Theodota without difficulty. But the usage of the Byzantine Empire required that the Patriarch should pronounce the sentence of divorce, and this Tarasios, who was a devoted partisan and active political agent of Irene, long refused to do. The imprudence of Constantine, and the insidious advice of Irene, soon involved the emperor in a dispute with the whole body of monks, who had an overwhelming influence in society. The Patriarch at last yielded to the influence of Irene, so far as to allow his catechist to give the veil to the Empress Maria, whom he pronounced divorced, and then to permit the celebration of the emperors marriage with Theodota by Joseph, one of the principal clergy of the patriarchal chapter, and abbot of a monastery in the capital.

In the Byzantine Empire, at this time, constant religious discussions and pretensions to superior sanctity, had introduced a profound religious spirit into the highest ranks of society. Numbers of the wealthiest nobles founded monasteries, into which they retired. The manners, the extensive charity, and the pure morality of these abbots, secured them the love and admiration of the people, and tended to disseminate a higher standard of morality than had previously prevailed in Constantinople. This fact must not be overlooked in estimating the various causes which led to the regeneration of the Eastern Empire under the Iconoclast emperors. Security of life and property, and all the foundations of national prosperity, are more closely connected with moral purity than the ruling classes are inclined to allow. It may not be quite useless, as an illustration of the state of the Byzantine empire, to remind the reader of the violence, injustice, and debauchery which prevailed at the courts of the west of Europe, including that of Charlemagne. While the Pope winked at the disorders in the palace of Charlemagne, the monks of the East prepared the public mind for the dethronement of Constantine, because he obtained an illegal divorce, and formed a second marriage. The corruption of morals, and the irregularities prevalent in the monasteries of the West, contrast strongly with the condition of the Eastern monks.

The habit of building monasteries as a place of retreat, from motives of piety, was also adopted by some as a mode of securing a portion of their wealth from confiscation, in case of their condemnation for political crimes, peculiar privileges being reserved in the monasteries so founded for members of the founder's family. At this time Plato, abbot of the monastery of Sakkoudion, on Mount Olympus in Bithynia, and his nephew Theodore, who was a relation of the new empress Theodota, were the leaders of a powerful party of monks possessing great influence in the church. Theodore (who is known by the name Studita, from having been afterwards appointed abbot of the celebrated monastery of Studion) had founded a monastery on his own property, in which he assembled his father, two brothers, and a young sister, and, emancipating all his household and agricultural slaves, established them as lay brethren on the farms. Most of the abbots round Constantinople were men of family and wealth, as well as learning and piety; but they repaid the sincere respect with which they were regarded by the people, by participating in popular prejudices, so that we cannot be surprised to find them constantly acting the part of demagogues. Plato separated himself from all spiritual communion with the Patriarch Tarasios, whom he declared to have violated the principles of Christianity in permitting the adulterous marriage of the emperor. His views were warmly supported. by his nephew Theodore, and many monks began openly to preach both against the Patriarch and the emperor. Irene now saw that the movement was taking a turn favorable to her ambition. She encouraged the monks, and prepared Tarasios for quitting the party of his sovereign. Plato and Theodore were dangerous enemies, from their great reputation and extensive political and ecclesiastical connections, and into a personal contest with these men Constantine rashly plunged.

Persecution of Theodore Studita. AD 797

Plato was arrested at his monastery, and placed in confinement under the wardship of the abbot Joseph, who had celebrated the imperial marriage. Theodore was banished to Thessalonica, whither he was conveyed by a detachment of police soldiers. He has left us an account of his journey, which proves that the orders of the emperor were not carried into execution with undue severity. Theodore and his attendant monks were seized by the imperial officers at a distance from the monastery, and compelled to commence their journey on the first horses their escort could, procure, instead of being permitted to send for their ambling mules. They were hurried forward for three days, resting during the night at Kathara in Liviana, Lefka, and Phyraion. At the last place they encountered a melancholy array of monks, driven from the great monastery of Sakkoudion after the arrest of Plato; but with these fellow-sufferers, though ranged along the road, Theodore was not allowed to communicate, except by bestowing on them his blessing as he rode past. He was then carried to Paula, from whence he wrote to Plato that he had seen his sister, with the venerable Sabas, abbot of the monastery of Studion. They had visited him secretly, but had been allowed by the guards to pass the evening in his society. Next night they reached Loupadion, where the exiles were kindly treated by their host. At Tilin they were joined by two abbots, Zacharias and Pionios, but they were not allowed to travel in company. The journey was continued by Alberiza, Anagegrammenos, Perperina, Parium, and Horkos, to Lampsacus. On the road, the bishops expressed the greatest sympathy and eagerness to serve them; but the bigoted Theodore declared that his conscience would not permit him to hold any communication with those who were so unchristian as to continue in communion with Tarasios and the emperor.

From Lampsacus the journey was prosecuted by sea. A pious governor received them at Abydos with great kindness, and they rested there eight days. At Eleaus there was again a detention of seven days, and from thence they sailed to Lemnos, where the bishop treated Theodore with so much attention that his bigotry was laid asleep. The passage from Lemnos to Thessalonica was not without danger from the piratical boats of the Slavonians who dwelt on the coast of Thrace, and exercised the trades of robbers and pirates as well as herdsmen and shepherds. A favorable wind carried the exiles without accident to Kanastron, from whence they touched at Pallene before entering the harbor of Thessalonica, which they reached on the 25th March, 797. Here they were received by a guard, and conducted through the city to the residence of the governor. The people assembled in crowds to view the pious opponents of their emperor; while the governor received them with marks of personal respect, which showed him more anxious to conciliate the powerful monks than to uphold the dignity of the weak emperor. He conducted. Theodore to the cathedral, that he might return thanks to God publicly for his safe arrival; he then waited on him to the palace of the archbishop, where he was treated to a bath, and entertained most hospitably. The exiles were, however, according to the tenor of the imperial orders, placed in separate places of confinement; and even Theodore and his brother were not permitted to dwell together. The day of their triumph was not far distant, and their banishment does not appear to have subjected them to much

inconvenience. They were martyrs at a small cost.

As soon as Irene thought that her son had rendered himself unpopular throughout the empire, she formed her plot for dethroning him. The support of the principal officers in the palace was secured by liberal promises of wealth and advancement: a band of conspirators was then appointed to seize Constantine, but a timely warning enabled him to escape to Triton on the Propontis. He might easily have recovered possession of the capital, had he not wasted two months in idleness and folly. Abandoned at last by every friend, he was seized by his mother's emissaries and dragged to Constantinople. After being detained some time a prisoner in the porphyry apartment in which he was born, his eyes were put out on the 19th August, 797. Constantine had given his cruel mother public marks of that affection which he appears really to have felt for her and to which he had sacrificed his best friends. He had erected a statue of bronze to her honor, which long adorned the hippodrome of Constantinople.

Irene was now publicly proclaimed sovereign of the empire. She had for some time been allowed by her careless son to direct the whole administration, and it was his confidence in her maternal affection which enabled her to work his ruin. She of course immediately released all the ecclesiastical opponents of her son from confinement, and restored them to their honors and offices. The Patriarch Tarasios was ordered to make his peace with the monks by excommunicating his creature, the abbot Joseph; and the closest alliance was formed between him and his former opponents, Plato and Theodore, the latter of whom was shortly after rewarded for his sufferings by being elevated to the dignity of abbot of the great monastery of Studion,

Character of, and Policy of the reign of Irene

The Empress Irene reigned five years, during which her peace was disturbed by the political intrigues of her ministers. Her life offers a more interesting subject for biography than for history, for it is more striking by its personal details, than important in its political effects. But the records of private life in the age in which she lived, and of the state of society at Athens, among which she was educated, are so few, that it would require to be written by a novelist, who could combine the strange vicissitudes of her fortunes with a true portraiture of human feelings, colored with a train of thought, and enriched with facts gleaned from contemporary lives and letters of Greek saints and monks. Born in a private in a provincial, though a wealthy and populous city, it must have required a rare combination of personal beauty, native grace, and mental superiority, to fill the rank of empress of the Romans, to which she was suddenly raised, at the court of a haughty sovereign like her father-in-law Constantine V, not only without embarrassment, but even with universal praise. Again, when vested with the regency, as widow of an Iconoclast emperor, it required no trifling talent, firmness of purpose, and conciliation of manner, to overthrow an ecclesiastical party which had ruled the church for more than half a century. On the other hand, the deliberate way in which she undermined the authority of her son, whose character she had corrupted by a bad education, and the callousness with which she gained his confidence in order to deprive him of his throne, and send him to pass his life as a blind monk in a secluded cell, proves that the beautiful empress, whose memory was cherished as an orthodox saint, was endowed with the thoughts and feelings of a demon. Strange to say, when the object of Irene's crimes was reached, she soon felt all the satiety of gratified ambition. She no longer took the interest she had previously taken in conducting the public business of the empire, and abandoned the exercise of her power to seven eunuchs, whom she selected to perform the duties of ministers of state. She forgot that her own elevation to the throne offered a tempting premium to successful treason. Nicephorus, the grand treasurer, cajoled her favorite eunuchs to join a plot, by which she was dethroned, and exiled to a monastery she had founded in Prince's Island; but she was soon after removed to Lesbos, where she died in a few months, almost forgotten. Her fate after her death was as singular as during her life. The unnatural mother was canonized by the Greeks as an orthodox saint, and at her native Athens several churches are still pointed out which she is said to have founded, though not on any certain authority.

Under the government of Constantine VI and Irene, the imperial policy, both in the civil administration and external relations, followed the course traced out by Leo the Isaurian. To reduce all the Slavonian colonists who had formed settlements within the bounds of the empire to complete submission, was the first object of Irene's regency. The extension of these settlements, after the great plague in 747, began to alarm the government. Extensive districts in Thrace, Macedonia, and the Peloponnesus, had assumed the form of independent communities, and hardly acknowledged allegiance to the central administration at Constantinople. Irene naturally took more than ordinary interest in the state of Greece. She kept up the closest communications with her family at Athens, and shared the desire of every Greek to repress the presumption of the Slavonians and restore the

ascendancy of the Greek population in the rural districts. In the year 783 she sent Stavrakios at the head of a well-appointed army to Thessalonica, to reduce the Slavonian tribes in Macedonia to direct dependence, and enforce the regular payment of tribute. From Thessalonica, Stavrakios marched through Macedonia and Greece to the Peloponnesus, punishing the Slavonians for the disorders they had committed, and carrying off a number of their able-bodied men to serve as soldiers or to be sold as slaves. In the following year Irene led the young Emperor Constantine to visit the Slavonian settlements in the vicinity of Thessalonica, which had been reduced to absolute submission. Berrhoea, like several Greek cities, had fallen into ruins; it was now rebuilt, and received the name of Irenopolis. Strong garrisons were placed in Philippopolis and Auchialos, to cut off all communication between the Slavonians in the empire, and their countrymen under the Bulgarian government. The Slavonians in Thrace and Macedonia, though unable to maintain their provincial independence, still took advantage of their position, when removed from the eye of the local administration, to form bands of robbers and pirates, which rendered the communications with Constantinople and Thessalonica at times insecure both by land and sea.

After Irene had dethroned her son, the Slavonian population gave proofs of dangerous activity. A conspiracy was formed to place one of the sons of Constantine V on the throne. Irene had banished her brothers-in-law to Athens, where they were sure of being carefully watched by her relations, who were strongly interested in supporting her cause. The project of the partisans of the exiled princes to seize Constantinople was discovered, and it was found that the chief reliance of the Isaurian party in Greece was placed in the assistance they expected to derive from the Slavonian population. The chief of Velzetia was to have carried off the sons of Constantine V from Athens, when the plan was discovered and frustrated by the vigilance of Irene's friends. The four unfortunate princes, who had already lost their tongues, were now deprived of their sight, and exiled with their brother Nicephorus to Panormus, where they were again made tools of a conspiracy in the reign of Michael I.

Saracen War

The war with the Saracens was carried on with varied success during the reigns of Leo IV, Constantine VI, and Irene. The military talents of Leo III and Constantine V had formed an army that resisted the forces of the caliphs under the powerful government of Mansur; and even after the veterans had been disbanded by Irene, the celebrated Haroun Al Rashid was unable to make any permanent conquests, though the empire was engaged in war with the Saracens, the Bulgarians, and the troops of Charlemagne at the same time.

In the year 782, Haroun was sent by his father, the Caliph Mahdy, to invade the empire, at the head of one hundred thousand men, attended by Rabia and Jahja the Barmecid. The object of the Mohammedan prince was, however, rather directed to pillaging the country, and carrying off prisoners to supply the slave-markets of his father's dominions, than to effect permanent conquests. The absence of a considerable part of the Byzantine army, which was engaged in Sicily suppressing the rebellion of Helpidios, enabled Haroun to march through all Asia Minor to the shores of the Bosphorus, and from the hill above Sutari to gaze on Constantinople, which must then have presented a more imposing aspect than Bagdad. Irene was compelled to purchase peace, or rather to conclude a truce for three years, by paying an annual tribute of seventy thousand pieces of gold, and stipulating to allow the Saracen army to retire unmolested with all its plunder; for Haroun and his generals found that their advance had involved them in many difficulties, of which an active enemy might have taken advantage. Haroun Al Rashid is said to have commanded in person against the Byzantine Empire in eight campaigns. Experience taught him to respect the valor and discipline of the Christian armies, whenever able officers enjoyed the confidence of the court of Constantinople; and when he ascended the throne, he deemed it necessary to form a permanent army along the Mesopotamian frontier, to strengthen the fortifications of the towns with additional works, and add to their means of defense by planting in them new colonies of Mohammedan inhabitants. During the time Constantine VI ruled the empire, he appeared several times at the head of the Byzantine armies, and his fickle character did not prevent his displaying firmness in the field. His popularity with the soldiers was viewed with jealousy by his mother, who labored to retard his movements, and prevent him from obtaining any decided success.

The Saracens acknowledged that the Greeks were their superiors in naval affairs; but in the year 792 they defeated the Byzantine fleet in the gulf of Attalia with great loss. The admiral, Theophilos, was taken prisoner, and solicited by the caliph to abjure Christianity and enter his service. The admiral refused to forsake his religion or serve against his country, and Haroun Al Rashid was mean enough to order him to be put to death.

When the Saracens heard that Constantine had been dethroned, and the empire was again ruled by a woman whom they had already compelled to pay tribute, they again plundered Asia Minor up to the walls of Ephesus. Irene, whose ministers were occupied with court intrigues, took no measures to resist the enemy, and was once more obliged to pay tribute to the caliph.

The annual incursions of the Saracens into the Christian territory were made in great part for the purpose of carrying away slaves; and great numbers of Christians were sold throughout the caliph's dominions into hopeless slavery. Haroun, therefore, took the field in his wars with the Byzantine empire more as a slave-merchant than a conqueror. But this very circumstance, which made war a commercial speculation, introduced humanity into the hostile operations of the Christians and Mohammedans: the lower classes were spared, as they were immediately sold for the price they would bring in the first slave-market; while prisoners of the better class were retained, in order to draw from them a higher ransom than their value as slaves, or to exchange them for men of equal rank who had fallen into the hands of the enemy. This circumstance had at last brought about a regular exchange of prisoners as early as the reign of Constantine V, AD 769.

In the year 797, a new clause was inserted in a treaty for the exchange of prisoners, binding the contracting parties to release all supernumerary captives, on the payment of a fixed sum for each individual. This arrangement enabled the Christians, who were generally the greatest sufferers, to save their friends from death or perpetual slavery, but it added to the inducements of the Saracens to invade the empire. The Byzantine, or, as they were still called, the Roman armies, were placed at a disadvantage in this species of warfare. Their discipline was adapted to defensive military operations, or to meet the enemy on the field of battle, but not to act with rapidity in plundering and carrying off slaves; while the state of society in Christian countries rendered the demand for slaves less constant than in countries where polygamy prevailed, and women were excluded from many of the duties of domestic service.

Bulgarian War

The war on the Bulgarian frontier was carried on simultaneously with that against the Mohammedans. In the year 788, a Bulgarian army surprised the general of Thrace, who had encamped carelessly on the banks of the Strymon, and destroyed him, with the greater part of the troops. In 791, Constantine VI took the field in person against Cardam, king of the Bulgarians, but the campaign was without any result: in the following year, however, the Emperor was defeated in a pitched battle, in which several of the ablest generals of the Roman armies were slain. Yet, in 796, Constantine again led his troops against the Bulgarians: though victorious, he obtained no success sufficient to compensate his former defeat. The effects of the military organization of the frontier by Constantine V are visible in the superiority which the Byzantine armies assumed, even after the loss of a battle, and the confidence with which they carried the war into the Bulgarian territory.

The Byzantine Empire was at this period the country in which there reigned a higher degree of order, and more justice, than in any other. This is shown by the extensive emigration of Armenian Christians which took place in the year 787. The Caliph Haroun Al Rashid, whose reputation among the Mohammedans has arisen rather from his orthodoxy than his virtues, persecuted his Christian subjects with great cruelty, and at last his oppression induced twelve thousand Armenians to quit their native country, and settle in the Byzantine Empire. Some years later, in the reign of Michael III the drunkard, orthodoxy became the great feature in the Byzantine administration; and, unfortunately, Christian orthodoxy strongly resembled Mohammedanism in the spirit of persecution. The Paulicians were then persecuted by the emperors, as the Armenians had previously been by the caliphs, and fled for toleration to the Mohammedans.





