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# The Fifth Century

*Edward Freeman*

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**The Fifth Century** Edward Freeman
The movements within and without the Empire which, in the course of a few years at the beginning of the fifth century, altogether changed the face of Western Europe have never, as far as I know, been told in our own tongue, perhaps not in any other tongue, as a connected tale. The facts are recorded by Gibbon with his usual accuracy, clearness, and careful reference to authorities; but they are scattered over several chapters and are never brought together in their relation to one another. To Gibbon, with Rome itself as his main subject, their importance lay chiefly in their purely Roman aspect, as so many blows dealt to the power of Rome. To our latest English inquirer into these times they naturally come in the same way, important only as they bear on the destinies of Italy and her invaders. Mr. Hodgkin does not give, because he was not called upon to give, a minute or a consecutive narrative any more than Gibbon does. Of the German writers on the *Völkerwanderung*, Dahn and Pallmann hardly touch these particular years; Wietersheim has a careful and critical examination of the facts and authorities; but it hardly amounts to a narrative. Of writers dealing specially with our own island, Lappenberg has a sketch, to the purpose as far as it goes, of the British side of the story, but he hardly attempts to connect it with the continental side. Mr. Green, in the *Making of England*, attempts no examination of authorities, and he gives a few words only to the continental side; but it is clear that he had fully grasped the connection between the two. Tillemont in a past age, Clinton in the age just before our own, have brought the authorities together with their usual painstaking research. And I venture to think that the time has not yet come when we can afford to cast away collectors whom no scrap of information in the original writers ever seems to escape. But Clinton does not attempt a narrative, and the narrative which the worthy Tillemont does attempt, though it is well to follow the example of Gibbon and Hodgkin in keeping it ever at our elbow, can hardly be looked on as sufficient according to the standard of modern criticism. Fauriel, in his *Histoire de la Gaule Meridionale sous la domination des conquérants Germains*, has used his authorities well, and he comes nearer than any other writer to giving a connected narrative of the events with which we are immediately concerned. Still his point of view, the point of view of a countryman of Sidonius and Gregory, is distinctly South-Gaulish. It is no part of his business to take any special points to connect the continental with the insular story...

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