

ARTICLE VI.

A STUDY OF THE INQUISITION.

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THREE hundred and fifty years after the death of Christ, the Church, which then met in "a large upper room," had spread over the Roman Empire. The idolatry then universal, was now suppressed by law. A Christian emperor was on the throne. Wealth, power, and honor were in the gift of the once persecuted disciples. But spiritual decline had kept pace with temporal advancement. The relics of saints and martyrs had become objects of worship. The belief that fraud may be rightly used for a good object had found many adherents. The rancor, tumult, and corruption of a political campaign had come to attend the election of religious rulers. Disputes upon matters of faith were urged with the fury of private animosity and the most bitter personal abuse. It was in behalf of a Church thus powerful and corrupt that Theodosius the Great first drew the persecuting sword, denounced the punishments of confiscation and death* upon the members of certain obnoxious sects, and provided that inquisitors should proceed against them. These may have been some of the regular imperial spies, whom the prefect was to assign to this special service (*det inquisitores*). The trial was to be in open forum (*aperiat forum*)—a method in striking contrast with that of later times. Yet evidently, by this edict, in the year 382, was laid the corner-stone of the Inquisition.

But though the law stood thus, the first notable instance of persecution unto death in the Christian world was when,

* Constantine had decreed the punishment of death for concealing the prohibited Arian *books*; i. e. for an *act* in defiance of the imperial command. Theodosius was the first to decree death *for opinion's sake*.

in this same reign, Maximus usurped the empire of the West. He tortured, condemned, and executed Priscillian, bishop of Avila, in Spain, and six of his adherents, persons of talent and celebrity, guilty of nothing more than doctrinal error. Even then the Christian Church was not ready to sanction such measures. Ambrose, of Milan, and Martin, of Tours, united to condemn the atrocity, and refused to commune with the bishop, Ithacius, who had acted as chief accuser. When, soon after, Maximus was defeated and slain by Theodosius, the heathen orator who pronounced the panegyric at the conqueror's triumphal entry into Rome did not hesitate to brand this persecution as one of the usurper's crimes. The bishop who had instigated it was at once deposed and banished. Every thing shows that the proceeding was one at which men were appalled.

During the long mediæval night the principle of persecution, more and more fully accepted, flashed out here and there in martyr fires, and invested the bishops, everywhere, with inquisitorial powers. But, to the honor of human nature be it said, these men, while chargeable with grave and numerous faults, failed to persecute in that pitiless way which alone can subdue all freedom of thought; that demanded men who should make a profession of cruelty, and to whose ranks all fierce and implacable spirits should be attracted.

Inhabiting several beautiful and fertile provinces in the south of France was "a race industrious, intellectual, addicted to commerce and the arts, and still more to poetry. Their land was the seat of the beautiful Provençal language and literature. The cities were numerous and flourishing, with governments almost republican, and carrying on a prosperous trade with the republics of Italy. The people tended to separate from the French, to whom they were inferior in the art of war, though they surpassed them in all the progress of civilization."* Among these had arisen certain sects, who were not at first regarded as dissenters from the dominant church, but simply as devoting

* Sismondi, "Histoire des Français," Vol. VI, ch. xxiv, page 256.

themselves to a purer and more spiritual life. Their excellence of character and purity of doctrine are attested by their persecutors. One declares, "If you interrogate them concerning their faith, nothing can be more Scriptural; if you inquire into their conversation, nothing can be more faultless. . . . They attack no one, they circumvent no one, they defraud no one. Their faces are pale with fasting. They eat not the bread of idleness, but labor with their own hands for the support of life."* But they had committed the inexpressible sin of attacking the corruptions sheltered under the Christian name, declaring it idolatry to worship saints, relics, or the consecrated host; denying the power of priest or pontiff to pardon sin, which they held to be the prerogative of God alone; and calling the Roman Church the very antichrist. Such were the Albigenses, who anticipated Luther by three hundred years in doctrine, though not in triumph. They were the forlorn hope of the Reformation, falling too far in the van to hear the advancing steps of those who yet should win the field. Never did men seem to suffer and die so vainly.

Innocent III, a clear-sighted, vigorous, determined man, who ascended in the year 1193 the pontifical throne, promptly sent into these provinces apostolical legates to act, in his name, with almost unlimited authority, bishops and archbishops being subjected to their commands—an important step toward the creation of a tribunal which should take the business of persecution out of the hands of the bishops.

At first the barons, chief among whom was Raymond, the powerful count of Thoulouse, seem to have dealt with the emissaries of the pope much as some of our Northern States did with the hunters of fugitive slaves, allowing them to come and go without opposition, but without aid. This was not, in general, from any partiality to the reformed doctrines, but from the statesman-like policy of not molest-

* Faber on "Vallenses and Albigenses," page 75. He quotes this from Bernard sup. Cant. Serm., LXV, opera, page 761.

ing orderly and industrious citizens. But neutrality was not tolerated, and when Raymond sought by partial compliance to satisfy the papal legates, they repudiated the inefficient persecution, and their leader, Peter of Castelnau, so pressed the demands of the Church that the interview closed with mutual threatening and defiance. Next morning Peter was slain by a follower of Raymond. By whomsoever instigated, by whatever motive prompted, this deed served as the occasion of a long meditated war.

ALBIGENSIAN CRUSADE.

Innocent III, on hearing of it, thundered against Raymond excommunication and interdict, absolved his subjects and allies from their oaths of allegiance, and empowered "any Catholic man . . . to act against his person, occupy and retain his lands, especially for the purpose of extirpating heresy." Letters of the same tenor were written to various barons, urging them to make instant war upon the heretics of Tholouse and the neighboring provinces. Arnould Almalric, abbé of Citeaux, famed for one fearful sentence, was made legate of the pope, and appointed, with the aid of the Bernardine friars, to preach a crusade against the Albigenses, such as had been waged against the Saracens. Arms and banners were to be emblazoned with the symbol of divine compassion, and in this army of cross-bearers every man, of whatever land, rank, or character, was urged to enlist. His reward should be all the fame and promotion that valor could win; all the treasure or lands that violence could seize, pardon for all sins past, indulgence for many days to come, and the certainty of salvation should he die in this holy war. These appeals to every passion of humanity soon gathered a numerous army. From far and near they came, from France and Spain and Italy, from Austria and England and Palestine—the baron, eager to extend his domain; the young adventurer, longing for fame and plunder; the criminal, who would wash the guilt from his soul by slaughter done in the name of Jesus;