

HISTORY OF ROMANISM.

BOOK I.

POPERY IN EMBRYO.

FROM THE EARLIEST CORRUPTIONS OF CHRISTIANITY TO THE
PAPAL SUPREMACY, A. D., 606.

CHAPTER I.

CHRISTIANITY PRIMITIVE AND PAPAL.

§ 1.—THE blessed founder of Christianity chose to make his advent among the lowly and the despised. This was agreeable to the spirit of that Holy Religion which he came to establish. There was a time when a multitude of his followers, astonished and convinced by the omnipotence displayed in his wondrous miracles, were disposed to “take him by force to make him a king,” but so far from encouraging their design, the inspired historian tells us “that he departed again, into a mountain himself alone.” (John vi., 15.) In reply to the inquiries of the Roman governor, he uttered those memorable words, “MY KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD,” and his whole conduct from the manger to the cross, and from the cross to the mount of ascension, was in strict accordance with this characteristic maxim of genuine Christianity.

§ 2.—In selecting those whom he would send forth as the apostles of his faith, he went, not to the mansions of the great or to the palaces of kings, but to the humble walks of life, and chose from the poor of this world, those who, in prosecuting their mission, were destined, like their divine master, to be despised and rejected of men. In performing the work which their Lord had given them to do, the lowly but zealous fisherman of Galilee, and the courageous tent-maker of Tarsus, with their faithful fellow-laborers, despising all earthly honors and worldly aggrandizement, were content to lay every laurel at the foot of Christ's cross, and to “count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, their Lord,” for whom they had “suffered the loss of all things.” (Philippians, iii., 8.)

Contrast.

Effect of persecution.

§ 3.—A few centuries afterward, we find the professed successor of Peter the fisherman, dwelling in a magnificent palace, attended by troops of soldiers ready to avenge the slightest insult offered to his dignity, surrounded by all the ensigns of worldly greatness, with more than regal splendor, proudly claiming to be the sovereign ruler of the universal church, the Vicegerent of God upon earth, whose decision is infallible and whose will is law. The contrast between these two pictures of Primitive Christianity in the first century, and Papal Christianity in the seventh or eighth, is so amazing, that we are irresistibly led to the inquiry, can they be the same? If one is a faithful picture of Christianity, can it be possible that the other is worthy of the name?

Leaving the reader to answer this question for himself, after accompanying us in the present history, we proceed to remark that this transformation cannot be supposed to have taken place all at once. The change from the lowliness of the one to the lordliness of the other, required ages to complete, and it was not till the lapse of more than five centuries from the death of the last of the apostles* that the transformation was entire.

§ 4.—The apostle Paul tells us that even in his day “the mystery of iniquity” had begun to work, and had it not been for the purifying influence of the fires of persecution kindled by the emperors of pagan Rome, the advance of ecclesiastical corruption and spiritual despotism would probably have been far more rapid than it was—and at an earlier period “the man of sin” have been “revealed,” even that “son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.” For three centuries after the ascension of Christ, his disciples were exposed, with but few and brief intermissions, to a succession of cruel and bitter persecutions and sufferings. The pampered wild beasts, kept for the amusement of the Roman populace, fattened upon the bodies of the martyrs of Jesus in the amphitheatres of Rome or of other cities of the empire, and hundreds of fires were fed by the living frames of those who “loved not their lives unto the death.” “They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheep skins and goat skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented (of whom the world was not worthy); they wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”

Under such a state of things, there was of course but little inducement to the worldly minded and ambitious, to seek admission to the church; and if during a season of relaxation some such might creep within its pale, it required only the mandate of another em-

* St. John is supposed to have died about A. D. 100. “He lived,” says Dr. Cave, “till the time of the Emperor Trajan, about the beginning of whose reign, he departed this life, very aged, about the ninety-eighth or ninety-ninth year of his age, as is generally thought.” See Cave’s Lives of the Apostles, page 104.

peror to kindle anew the fires of persecution in order to separate the dross from the gold. This opposition of the powers and potentes of the earth, constituted the most effectual barrier against the speedier progress of corruption in the church, and according to the prediction of St. Paul, before "the man of sin" could be revealed it was necessary that this let or hindrance should be removed. It can scarcely be doubted that the apostle referred to the continuance of persecuting pagan Rome, when he said, "and now ye know what withholdeth, that he might be revealed in his time, for the mystery of iniquity doth already work, only he who now letteth will let until he be taken out of the way; AND THEN SHALL THAT WICKED BE REVEALED."

§ 5.—It is an important fact that Popery is plainly a subject of prophetic prediction in the Sacred Scriptures, and though the almost entire subversion of true Christianity, which occurred in the course of only a few centuries, might otherwise have a tendency to stagger our faith in its divine origin, yet when it is remembered that this great antichristian Apostasy or "falling away" (*αποστασία*) happened in exact accordance with "the scriptures of truth," the fact serves to strengthen rather than to shake our faith in the divinity of our holy religion. Not long ago, the remark was made by a Roman Catholic, "The Bible cannot be true without Holy Mother of Rome." He meant to say that the Pope gives it all its evidence and authority. "Very true," said a Protestant: "for as the Holy Bible has predicted the rise, power, and calamities of Popery—if these predictions had not been fully manifested in the actual existence and tremendous evils of Popery, the Bible would have wanted the fulfilment of its prophecies, and therefore would not have been true!" The same thought was recently suggested in an eloquent discourse by Professor Gaussen, of Geneva, before his Theological class. "In pointing to the Pope," said he, "*we point to a miracle which calls upon us to believe the Bible!*" Considered in this view, the obduracy of the Romanists, like the obduracy of the Jews, wonderfully instructs the church, *because it has been foretold*; and thus it is that the scandals of Rome are transformed into an eloquent argument. The sovereign pontiff and the Romish hierarchy become, in this way, admirable supports of the truth."

To prove that Popery is the subject of prophetic prediction, it would be easy to produce a multitude of passages, but we shall content ourselves for the present with citing entire the full length portrait of the Romish Apostasy in the second epistle to the Thessalonians, chap. ii., v. 1, &c., and in first Timothy, chap. iv., v. 1, &c. "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself

Inspired descriptions of the Romish Apostasy.

Tertullian quoted.

above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that when I was yet with you I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth." How accurate is this inspired portrait of the GREAT APOSTASY of Rome, although penned five or six centuries before its complete development! Aside from the accurate symbolical descriptions of the same power in the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelations, these two passages alone constitute a complete prophetic picture of the Papal anti-Christ, in which every feature, every lineament is drawn to the very life; nor is this to be wondered at, for it was sketched by the pencil of Omniscience itself.

It is obvious that the wicked power which in the former of these passages is the subject of the apostle's discourse, and denominated THE MAN OF SIN, had not then been fully displayed, and that there existed some obstacle to a complete revelation of the mystery of iniquity. The apostle uses a particular caution when hinting at it; but the Thessalonians, he says, knew of it; probably from the explanation he had given them verbally, when he was with them. It can scarcely be questioned, that the hindrance or obstacle, referred to in these words, was the heathen or pagan Roman government, which acted as a restraint upon the pride and domination of the clergy, through whom the man of sin ultimately arrived at his power and authority, as will afterwards appear. The extreme caution which the apostle manifests in speaking of this restraint, renders it not improbable that it was something relating to the higher powers; for we can easily conceive how improper it would have been to declare in plain terms, that the existing government of Rome should come to an end.

There is a remarkable passage in Tertullian's Apology, that may serve to justify the sense which Protestants put upon these verses; and since it was written long before the accomplishment of the predictions, it deserves the more attention. "Christians," says he, "are under a particular necessity of praying for the emperors, and for the continued state of the empire; because we know that dreadful

power which hangs over the world, and *the conclusion of the age, which threatens the most horrible evils, is restrained by the continuance of the time appointed for the Roman empire.* This is what we would not experience; and while we pray that it may be deferred, we hereby show our good-will to the perpetuity of the Roman state.* From this extract it is very manifest that the Christians, even in Tertullian's time, a hundred and twenty years before the pagan government of Rome came to its end, looked forward to that period as pregnant with calamity to the cause of Christ; though it is probable they did not accurately understand the manner in which the evils should be brought on the church. And this, indeed, the event proved to be the case. For while the long and harassing persecutions, which were carried on by the pagan Roman emperors, continued, and all secular advantages were on the side of Paganism, there was little encouragement for any one to embrace Christianity, who did not discern somewhat of its truth and excellence.

§ 6.—Many of the errors, indeed, of several centuries, the fruit of vain philosophy, paved the way for the events which followed; but the hindrance was not effectually removed, until Constantine the emperor, on professing himself a Christian, undertook to convert the kingdom of Christ into a kingdom of this world, by exalting the teachers of Christianity to the same state of affluence, grandeur, and influence in the empire, as had been enjoyed by pagan priests and secular officers in the state. The professed ministers of Jesus having now a wide field opened to them for gratifying their lust of power, wealth, and dignity, the connection between the Christian faith and the cross was at an end. What followed was the kingdom of the clergy, supplanting the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Every feature in the inspired description corresponds to that of a religious power, in the assumption of Divine authority, Divine honors, and Divine worship; a power which should arrogate the prerogatives of the Most High, having its seat in the temple or house of God, and which should be carried on by Satan's influence, with all deceit, hypocrisy, and tyranny; and with this corresponds the figurative representation given of the same power, in the thirteenth chapter of Revelations.

As many things in the Christian profession, before the reign of Constantine, made way for the kingdom of the clergy, so, after they were raised to stations of temporal dignity and power, it was not wholly at one stride that they arrived at the climax here depicted by the inspired apostle. Neither the corruption of Christianity, nor the reformation of its abuses, was effected in a day; "evil men and seducers waxed worse and worse."

In the sequel, it will appear, that when the bishops were once exalted to wealth, power, and authority, this exaltation was of itself the prolific source of every corrupt fruit. Learning, eloquence, and influence, were chiefly exerted to maintain their own personal

* Tertullian's Apology, ch. xxxii.

Christ's kingdom not of this world.

Effects of losing sight of this important principle.

dominion and popularity. Contests for pre-eminence over each other, became the succedaneum of the ancient contention for the faith, and its influence over the world.

All the violent contentions, the assembling of councils, the persecutions alternately carried on by the different parties, were so many means of preparing the way for the assumption of spiritual tyranny, and the idolatry and superstition of the Roman hierarchy. In all these transactions, the substitution of human for divine authority; contentions about words instead of the faith once delivered to the saints; pomp and splendor of worship, for the primitive simplicity; and worldly power and dignity instead of the self-denied labors of love and bearing the cross;—this baneful change operated in darkening the human mind as to the real nature of true Christianity, until, in process of time, it was lost sight of.

When Jesus Christ was interrogated by the Roman governor concerning his kingdom, he replied, "My kingdom is not of this world." This is a maxim of unspeakable importance in his religion; and almost every corruption that has arisen, and by which this heavenly institution has been debased, from time to time, may be traced, in one way or other, to a departure from that great and fundamental principle of the Christian kingdom.*

CHAPTER II.

RELIGION IN ALLIANCE WITH THE STATE.

§ 7.—It was owing to forgetfulness or disregard of the important principle, mentioned at the close of the last chapter, viz., that Christ's kingdom is not of this world, that the emperor Constantine, soon after his remarkable, and as some suppose, miraculous conversion to Christianity in the year 312, took the religion of Christ to the unhallowed embraces of the state, assumed to unite in his own person the civil and ecclesiastical dominion, and claimed the power of convening councils and presiding in them, and of regulating the external affairs of the church. The account of Constantine's conversion, which is related by Eusebius in his life of the Emperor, by whom the particulars were communicated to the historian, is as follows: (Eusebius, *vita Const.*, lib. i., chap. 28., &c.) At the head of his army, Constantine was marching from France into Italy, op-

* See Jones's *Ch. Hist.*, ch. ii., sect. 4.