

SHORT PAPERS ON CHURCH HISTORY

CHAPTER 8

THE INTERNAL HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

Here we step once more on sure ground. We have the privilege and satisfaction of appealing to the sacred writings. Before the canon of scripture was closed, many of the errors, both in doctrine and practice, which have since troubled and rent in pieces the professing church, were allowed to spring up. These were, in the wisdom and grace of God, detected and exposed by the inspired apostles. If we keep this in mind, we shall not be surprised to meet with many things in the internal history of the church entirely contrary to scripture. Neither need we have any difficulty in withstanding them. We have been armed by the apostles. The love of office and preeminence in the church was manifested at an early period, and many observances of mere official invention were added. The “grain of mustard seed” became a great tree — the symbol of political power on the earth: this was and is the outward aspect of Christendom; but inwardly the *leaven* did its evil work, “till the whole was leavened.”

Those who have carefully studied Matthew 13 with other passages in the Acts and the Epistles relating to the profession of the name of Christ, should have a very correct idea of both the early and later history of the church. It embraces the entire period, from the sowing of the seed by the Son of man, until the harvest, though under the similitude of the kingdom of heaven. This is a great relief to the mind, and prepares us for many a dark and distressing scene, wickedly perpetrated under the fair name and cloak of Christianity. We will now turn to some of these passages.

1. Our blessed Lord, in the parable of the wheat and tares, predicts what would take place. “The kingdom of heaven,” He says, “is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.” In course of time the blade sprang up and brought forth fruit. This was the rapid spread of Christianity in the earth. But we also read “then appeared the tares also.” These were false professors of Christ’s name. The Lord Jesus sowed good seed. Satan, through the carelessness and infirmity of man, sowed tares. But what was to be done with them? Were they to be rooted out of the kingdom? The Lord says, No; “lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest,” that is, till the end of the age or dispensation when the Lord comes in judgment.

But here, some may inquire, Does the Lord mean that the wheat and the tares are to grow together in the church? Certainly not. They were not to be rooted

out of the field, but to be put out of the church when manifested as wicked persons. The church and the kingdom are quite distinct though the one may be said to be in the other. The *field* is the world, not the church. The limits of the kingdom stretch far beyond the limits of the true church of God. Christ builds the church; men have to do with extending the proportions of Christendom. If the expression, “the kingdom of heaven,” meant the same as “the church of God,” there ought to be no discipline at all. Whereas the apostle, in writing to the Corinthians, expressly says, “Put away from among yourselves that wicked person.” But he was not to be put out of the kingdom, for that could only be done by taking away his life. The wheat and the tares are to grow together in the field until the harvest. Then the Lord Himself, in His providence will deal with the tares. They shall be bound in bundles and cast into the fire. Nothing can be plainer than the Lord’s teaching in this parable. The tares are to be put away from the Lord’s table, but not rooted out of the field. The church was not to use worldly punishments in dealing with ecclesiastical offenders. But alas! the very thing which the Lord is here guarding His disciples against came to pass, as the long list of martyrs so painfully shows. Pains and penalties were brought in as discipline, and the refractory were handed over to the civil power to be punished with fire and sword.

2. In Acts 20 we read that “grievous wolves” would make their appearance in the church after the departure of the apostle. In Paul’s Epistles to the Thessalonians — supposed to be his first inspired Epistles — he tells them that the mystery of iniquity was already at work, and that other evil things would follow. In writing to the Philippians he tells them, weeping, that many walk as “the enemies of the cross of Christ; whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.” Many were calling themselves Christians, but minding earthly things. Such a state of things could not escape the spiritual eye of him whose *one object* was Christ in glory and practical conformity to His ways when on earth. In his Second Epistle to Timothy — probably the last he ever wrote he compares Christendom to “a great house,” in which are all manner of vessels, “some to honour and some to dishonour.” This is a picture of the outward universal church. Nevertheless, the Christian cannot leave it, and individual responsibility can never cease. But he is to clear himself from all that is contrary to the name of the Lord. The directions are most plain and precious for the spiritually minded in all ages. The Christian must have no association with that which is untrue. Such is the meaning of purging himself from the vessels to dishonour. He is to clear himself from all that is not to the Lord’s honour. John and the other apostles speak of the same things, and give the same divine directions, but we need not here pursue them farther. Enough has been pointed out to prepare the reader for what we must meet with in that which calls itself *Christian*.

THE IMMEDIATE FOLLOWERS OF THE APOSTLES

Here an important question arises, and one that has been often asked, At what time, and by what means, did *clericalism* — the whole system of clergy — gain so firm a footing in the professing church? To answer this question fully would be to write in detail the internal history of the church. Its constitution and character were wholly changed by the introduction of the clerical system. But its growth and organization was gradual. Arguments were drawn from the Old Testament, and, in a short time, Christianity was recast in the mould of Judaism. The distinction between bishops and presbyters, between a priestly order and the common priesthood of all believers, and the multiplication of church offices, followed rapidly as consequences. But however difficult it may be now to trace the inroads of clericalism, the *synagogue* was its model.

We learn from the whole of the New Testament that *Judaism* was the unwearied and unrelenting enemy of Christianity in every point of view. It laboured incessantly, on the one hand to introduce its rites and ceremonies and on the other to persecute unto the death all who were faithful to Christ and to the true principles of the church of God. This we see especially from the Acts and the Epistles. But when the extraordinary gifts in the church ceased, and when the noble defenders of the faith, in the persons of the inspired apostles, passed away, we may easily imagine how Judaism would prevail. Besides, the early churches were chiefly composed of converts from the Jewish synagogue, who long retained their Jewish prejudices.

Clericalism, then, we firmly believe sprang from **Judaism**. From the days of the apostles until now the root of the whole fabric and dominion of clericalism is there. Philosophy and heterodoxy, no doubt, did much to corrupt the church and lead her to join hands with the world: but the order of the clergy and all that belongs to it must be founded on the Jews' religion. It is more than probable, however, that many may have been persuaded then, as many have been since, that Christianity is a *continuation* of Judaism, in place of being its perfect *contrast*. The Judaizing teachers boldly affirmed that Christianity was merely a graft on Judaism. But throughout the epistles we everywhere learn that the one was earthly and the other heavenly; that the one belonged to the old, and the other to the new creation; that the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

We will now return to the immediate followers of the apostles.

The Apostolic Fathers, as they are called, such as Clement, Polycarp, Ignatius, and Barnabas, were the immediate followers of the inspired apostles. They had listened to their instructions, laboured with them in the gospel, and probably had been familiarly acquainted with them. But, notwithstanding the high privileges which they enjoyed as scholars of the apostles, they very soon departed from the doctrines which had been committed to them, especially as to church government. They seem to have completely forgotten — judging

from the Epistles which bear their names — the great New Testament truth of the Holy Spirit's presence in the assembly. Surely both John and Paul speak much of the presence, indwelling, sovereign rule, and authority of the Holy Spirit in the church. John 13-16; Acts 2:1, 1 Corinthians 12:14, Ephesians 1-4 give plain directions and instructions on this fundamental truth of the church of God. Had this truth been maintained according to the apostle's exhortation "Endeavouring to keep" — not to make — "the unity of the Spirit," clericalism could never have found a place in Christendom.

The new teachers of the church seem also to have forgotten the beautiful simplicity of the divine order in the church. There were only two orders of office-bearers — elders and deacons. The one was appointed to attend to the temporal, the other to the spiritual need of the assembly of the saints. Elder, or bishop, simply means overseer, one who takes a spiritual oversight. He may have been "apt to teach," or he may not; he was not an ordained teacher, but an ordained overseer. And as for the institutions of divine appointment, we only find in the New Testament, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Nothing could be more simple, more plain, or more easily understood, as to all the directions given for faith and practice, but there was no room left for the exaltation and glory of man in the church of God. The Holy Ghost had come down to take the lead in the assembly, according to the word of the Lord, and the promise of the Father; and no Christian, however gifted, believing this, could take the place of leader, and thus practically displace the Holy Spirit. But, from the moment that this truth was lost sight of, men began to contend for place and power, and of course the Holy Spirit had no longer His right place in the assembly.

Scarcely had the voice of inspiration become silent in the church, than we hear the voice of the new teachers crying loudly and earnestly for the highest honours being paid to the bishop, and a supreme place being given to him. Not a word about the Spirit's place as sovereign ruler in the church of God. This is evident from the Epistles of Ignatius, said to have been written A.D. 107. Many great names, we are aware, have questioned their authenticity; and many great names contend that they have been satisfactorily proved to be genuine. The proofs on either side lie outside of our line. The Church of England has long accepted them as genuine, and considers them as the basis, and as the triumphant vindication, of the antiquity of episcopacy. The following are a few specimens of his admonitions to the churches.

Ignatius, in the course of his journey from Antioch to Rome,³⁸ wrote seven Epistles. One to the Ephesians, Magnesians, Trallians, Romans, Philadelphians, Smyrneans, and one to his friend Polycarp. Being written on the eve of his martyrdom, and with great earnestness and vehemence, and having been the disciple and friend of St. John, and at that time bishop of Antioch, probably the most renowned in Christendom, his Epistles must have

³⁸ See [Journey and Martyrdom of Ignatius](#), p. 246.

produced a great impression on the churches; besides the way to office, authority, and power has always a great charm for vain human nature.

In writing to the church at Ephesus he says, "Let us take heed, brethren, that we set not ourselves against the bishop, that we may be subject to God... It is therefore evident that we ought to look upon the bishop even as we do upon the Lord Himself." In his Epistle to the Magnesians he says, "I exhort you that ye study to do all things in a divine concord; your bishops presiding in the place of God; your presbyters in the place of the council of the apostles; and your deacons, most dear to me, being entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ." We find the same strain in his letter to the Trallians: "Whereas ye are subject to your bishop as to Jesus Christ, ye appear to me to live, not after the manner of men, but according to Jesus Christ who died for us... Guard yourselves against such persons; and that you will do if you are not puffed up: but continue inseparable from Jesus Christ our God, and from your bishop, and from the commands of the apostles." Passing over several of his letters to the churches, we only give one more specimen from his Epistle to the Philadelphians: "I cried whilst I was among you, I spake with a loud voice, Attend to the bishop, and to the presbytery, and to the deacons. Now some supposed that I spake this as foreseeing the division that should come among you. But He is my witness for whose sake I am in bonds, that I knew nothing from any man; but the Spirit spake, saying on this wise: Do nothing without the bishop; keep your bodies as the temples of God: love unity; flee divisions, be the followers of Christ, as He was of His Father."³⁹

In the last quotation it is very evident that the venerable father wishes to add to his theories the weight of inspiration. But, however extravagant and unaccountable this idea may be, we must give him credit for believing what he says. That he was a devout Christian, and full of religious zeal, no one can doubt, but that he greatly deceived himself in this and in other matters there can be as little doubt. The leading idea in all his letters is the perfect submission of the people to their rulers, or of the laity to their clergy. He was, no doubt, anxious for the welfare of the church, and fearing the effect of the "divisions" which he refers to, he probably thought that a strong government, in the hands of rulers, would be the best means of preserving it from the inroads of error. "Give diligence," he says, "to be established in the doctrine of our Lord and the apostles, together with your most worthy bishop, and the well-woven spiritual crown of your presbytery, and your godly deacons. Be subject to your bishop and to one another, as Jesus Christ to the Father, according to the flesh; and as the apostles to Christ, and to the Father, and to the Spirit; that so there may be a union among you both in body and in spirit." Thus **the mitre** was placed on the head of the highest dignitary, and henceforth became the object of ecclesiastical ambition, and not

³⁹ The above extracts are taken from *Wake's Translation*. See also "A Full and Faithful Analysis of the Writings of Ignatius, Clement, Polycarp, and Hermas." *The Inquirer*, vol. 2, p. 317.

infrequently of the most unseemly contention, with all their demoralizing consequences.

CLERICALISM, MINISTRY, AND INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

It is assumed that these Epistles were written only a few years after the death of St. John, and that the writer must have been intimately acquainted with his mind, and was only carrying out his views. Hence it is said, that episcopacy is coeval with Christianity. But it matters comparatively little by whom they were written, or the precise time, they are not scripture, and the reader must judge of their character by the word of God, and of their influence by the history of the church. The mind of the Lord, concerning His church, and the responsibility of His people, must be learnt from His own word, and not from the writings of any Father, however early or esteemed. And here, it may be well, before leaving this point, to place before our readers a few portions of the word, which they will do well to compare with the above extracts. They refer to christian ministry and individual responsibility. Thus learn the mighty difference between ministry and office; or, between being esteemed for your work's sake, not merely *office's sake*.

In the Gospel of St. Matthew, from verse 45 of chapter 24 to verse 31 of chapter 25, we have three parables, in which the Lord addresses the disciples as to their conduct during His absence.

1. The subject of the first is the responsibility of ministry within the house — in the church. “Whose house are we.” Thus we read, “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods.” Real ministry is of the Lord and of Him alone. This is what we have to note in view of what took place on the very threshold of Christianity. And He makes much of faithfulness or unfaithfulness in His house. His people are near and dear to His heart. Those who have been humble and faithful during His absence will be made rulers over all His goods when He returns. The true minister of Christ has to do directly with Himself. He is the hireling of no man, or of any particular body of men. “Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.” Failure in ministry is also spoken of and dealt with by the Lord Himself.

“But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming, and shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken.” This is the other and sad side of the picture. The character of ministry is greatly affected by holding or rejecting the truth of the Lord's coming. In place of devoted service to the household, with his heart set on the master's approval on his return, there is assumption, tyranny, and worldliness. The doom of such, when the Lord comes, will be worse than that

of the world. He shall “appoint him his portion with the hypocrites” — Judas’ place — where “there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Such are the fearful consequences of forgetfulness of the Lord’s return. But this is more than a mere doctrinal mistake, or a difference of opinion about the coming of the Lord. It was “*in his heart*,” his will was concerned in it. He wished in his heart that his Lord would stay away, as His coming would spoil all his schemes, and bring to a close all his worldly greatness. Is not this too true a picture of what has happened? and what a solemn lesson for those who take to themselves a place of service in the church! The mere appointment of the sovereign, or the choice of the people, will not be enough in that day, unless they have also been the chosen of the Lord and faithful in His house.

2. In the second parable, professing Christians, during the Lord’s absence, are represented as virgins who went out to meet the Bridegroom and light Him to His house. This was the attitude of the early Christians. They came out from the world, and from Judaism, to go forth and meet the Bridegroom. But we know what happened. He tarries: they all slumbered and slept. “And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him.” From the first till the beginning of the present century, we hear very little about the coming of the Lord. Now and then, here and there, a feeble voice may be heard on the subject; but not until the early part of the present century did the midnight cry go forth. Now we have many tracts and volumes on the subject, and many are preaching it in nearly all lands under heaven. The midnight is past, the morning cometh.

The revival of the truth of the Lord’s coming marks a distinct epoch in the history of the church. And, like all revivals, it was the work of the Holy Spirit, and that by instruments of His own choosing, and by means which He saw fitting. And how like the Lord’s long-suffering, that in this great movement there should be time given between the cry and the arrival of the Bridegroom to prove the condition of each. Five of the ten virgins had no oil in their lamps — no Christ, no Holy Spirit dwelling in them. They had only the outward lamp of profession. How awfully solemn the thought, if we look at Christendom from this point of view! Five of every ten are *unreal*, and against them the door will be shut for ever. How this thought should move to earnestness and energy in evangelising! May we wisely improve the time thus graciously given between the going forth of the midnight cry, and the coming of the Bridegroom.

3. In the first parable, it is ministry *inside the house*, in the third, it is ministry *outside the house* — evangelising. In the second parable, it is the personal expectation of the Lord’s coming, with the possession of that which is requisite to go in with Him to the marriage supper of the King’s son.

“The kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his

several ability; and straightway took his journey.” Here the Lord is represented as leaving this world and going back to heaven; and while He is gone there, His servants are to trade with the talents committed to them. “Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.” Here we have the true principle and the true character of christian ministry. The Lord Himself called the servants, and gave them the talents, and the servant is responsible to the Lord Himself for the fulfilment of his calling. The exercise of gift, whether *inside* or *outside* the house, although subject to the directions of the word and always to be exercised in love and for blessing, is in no wise dependent on the will of sovereign, priest, or people, but on Christ only, the true Head of the church. It is a grave and solemn thing for any one to interfere with Christ’s claims on the service of His servant. To touch this is to set aside responsibility to Christ, and to overthrow the fundamental principle of Christian ministry.

Priesthood was the distinguishing characteristic of the Jewish dispensation; *ministry*, according to God, is characteristic of the Christian period. Hence the utter failure of the professing church, when it sought to imitate Judaism in so many ways, both in its priesthood and its ritualism. If a priestly order, with rites and ceremonies, be still necessary, the efficacy of the work of Christ is called in question. In fact, though not in words, it strikes at the root of Christianity. But all is settled by the word of God. “But this man, after he had offered *one* sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down at the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified... Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.” (see Heb. 10: 1-25)

Ministry, then, is a subject of the highest dignity and the deepest interest. It testifies to the work, the victory, and the glory of Jesus, that the lost may be saved. It is the activity of God’s love going out to an alien and ruined world, and earnestly beseeching souls to be reconciled to Him. “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, *and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.*” (2 Cor. 5: 19-21) Jewish priesthood maintained the people in their relations with God: christian ministry is God in grace by His servants delivering souls from sin and ruin, and bringing them near to Himself, as happy worshippers in the most holy place.

To return to our parable, there is one thing specially to be noticed here, as showing the Lord’s sovereignty and wisdom in connection with ministry. He gave differently to each, and to each according to his ability. Each one had a natural capacity which fitted him for the service in which he was employed, and gifts bestowed according to the measure of the gift of Christ for its fulfilment. “He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets, and some, evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.” (Eph. 4) The servant must have certain natural qualifications for his work, besides the power of the Spirit of

God. If the Lord calls a man to preach the gospel, there will be a natural ability for it. Then the Lord may create in his heart by the Holy Spirit a real love for souls, which is the best gift of the evangelist. Then he ought to stir up and exercise his gift according to his ability, for the blessing of souls and the glory of God. May we remember that we are responsible for these two things — the gift graciously bestowed, and the ability in which the gift is to be exercised. When the Lord comes to reckon with His servants, it will not be enough to say, I was never educated for, or appointed to, the ministry. The question will be, Did I wait on the Lord to be used by Him according to what He had fitted me for? or did I hide my talent in the earth? Faithfulness or unfaithfulness to Him will be the only thing in question.

That which distinguished the faithful from the unfaithful servant was *confidence* in their master. The unfaithful servant knew not the Lord: he acted from fear, not from love, and so hid his one talent in the earth. The faithful knew the Lord, trusted Him, and served from love, and was rewarded. Love is the only true spring of service for Christ, either in the church or in the outside world. May we never be found making excuses for ourselves, like the “wicked and slothful” servant, but be ever reckoning on the love, grace, truth, and power of our blessed Saviour and Lord.

THE EFFECT OF THE NEW ORDER OF CLERGY

It may be only fair to suppose that those good men, by whose means a new order of things was brought into the church, and the free ministry of the Holy Spirit in the members of the body excluded, had the welfare of the church at heart. It is evident that Ignatius, by this arrangement, hoped to avoid “divisions.” But, however good our motives may be, it is the height of human folly — if not worse — to interfere with, or seek to change, the order of God. This was Eve’s mistake, and we all know the consequences too well. It was also the original sin of the church, from which it has suffered these eighteen hundred years.

The Holy Ghost sent down from heaven is the only power of ministry but the Lord must be left free to choose and employ His own servants. Human arrangements and appointments necessarily interfere with the liberty of the Spirit. They quench the Holy Spirit: He only knows where the ability is, and where, when, and how to dispense the gifts. Speaking of the church as it was in the days of the apostles, it is said, “But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He [the Holy Ghost] will.” And again, we read, “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal,” or for the profit of all. (1 Cor. 12) Here all is in divine hands. The Holy Spirit dispenses the gift. It is to be exercised in acknowledgement of the Lordship of Christ; and God gives efficacy to the ministry. What a ministry — Spirit,

Lord, and God — its source, power and character! How great, how sad, the change to king, prelate, or people! Is not this apostasy? But while we object to mere human appointment to office, qualified or not qualified, we would contend most earnestly for the ministry of the word to both saints and sinners.

The church alas! soon found that to hinder ministry, as it is set before us in the word of God, and to introduce a new order of things, did not hinder divisions, heresies, and false teachers springing up. True, the flesh, in the most real and gifted Christian, may manifest itself; but when the Spirit of God is acting in power, and the authority of the word owned, the remedy is at hand: the evil will be judged in humility and faithfulness to Christ. From this time — the beginning of the second century, and before it — the church was greatly disturbed by heresies; and as time rolled on, things never grew better, but always worse.

Irenaeus, a Christian of great celebrity, who succeeded Pothinus as bishop of Lyon, A.D. 177, has left us much information on the subject of the early heresies. He is supposed to have written about the year 183. His great book “*against heresies*” is said to contain a defence of the holy catholic faith, and an examination and refutation of the false doctrines advocated by the principal heretics.⁴⁰

THE ORIGIN OF THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN CLERGY AND LAITY

Christianity at the beginning had no *separate priestly order*. Its *first* converts went everywhere preaching the Lord Jesus. They were the *first* to spread abroad the glad tidings of salvation, even before the apostles themselves had left Jerusalem. (Acts 8:4) In course of time, when converts were found sufficient in any place to form an assembly, they came together in the name of the Lord on the first day of the week to break bread, and to edify one another in love. (Acts 20:7) When the opportunity came for an apostle to visit such gatherings, he chose elders to take the oversight of the little flock; deacons were chosen by the assembly. This was the entire constitution of the first churches. If the Lord raised up an evangelist, and souls were converted, they were baptised unto the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. This was, of course, outside the assembly, and not a church act. After due examination by the spiritual as to the genuineness of the evangelist’s work, the assembly being satisfied, they were received into communion.

It will be seen, from this brief sketch of the divine order of the churches, that there was no distinction such as “the clergy,” and “the laity.” All stood on the same ground as to priesthood, worship and nearness to God. As the apostles Peter and John say, “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus

⁴⁰ *Irenaeus against Heresies*. Clarke, Edinburgh.

Christ.” And thus could the whole assembly sing, “Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood; and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.” The only priesthood, then, in the church of God is the common **priesthood of all believers**. The humblest menial in the palace of the archbishop, if washed in the blood of Christ, is whiter than snow, and fitted to enter the most holy place, and worship within the veil.

There is no outer court worship now. The separation of a privileged class — a sacerdotal order — is unknown in the New Testament. The distinction between *clergy* and *laity* was suggested by Judaism, and human invention soon made it great; but it was episcopal ordination that established the distinction, and widened the separation. The bishop gradually assumed the title of Pontiff. The presbyters, and at length the deacons, became, as well as the bishops, a sacred order. The place of mediation and of greater nearness to God was assumed by the priestly caste, and also of authority over the laity. In place of God speaking direct to the heart and conscience by His own word, and the heart and conscience brought direct into the presence of God, it was priesthood coming in between them. Thus the word of God was lost sight of, and faith stood in the opinions of men. The blessed Lord Jesus, as the Great High Priest of His people, and as the one Mediator between God and men, was thus practically displaced and set aside.⁴¹

Thus alas! we see in the church what has been true of man from Adam downwards. Everything that has been entrusted to man has failed. From the time that the responsibility of maintaining the church as the pillar and ground of the truth fell into man’s hands, there has been nothing but failure. The word of God, however, remains the same, and its authority can never fail, blessed be His name. One of the main objects of these “Short Papers” is to recall the reader’s attention to the principles and order of the church, as taught in the New Testament. “God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” That is, we must worship and serve Him according to the truth, and under the guidance and unction of the Holy Spirit, if we would glorify His name, and worship and serve Him acceptably.

Almost all ecclesiastical writers affirm *that neither the Lord Himself nor His apostles gave any distinct precepts as to the order and government of the church — that such things were left to the wisdom and prudence of her office-bearers, and the character of the times*. By this assumption the widest range was given to the human will. We know the consequences. Man sought his own

⁴¹ One of the highest authorities as to episcopal order is of opinion that the distinction between the clergy and the laity is derived from the Old Testament: that as the high priest had his office assigned him, and the priests also their proper station, and the Levites their peculiar service; so laymen in like manner were under the obligations proper to laymen. He also states that the common priesthood of all believers is taught in the New Testament, but that the Fathers from the earliest times formed the church on the Jewish system. — *Bingham on the Antiquity of the Christian Church*, vol. 1, p. 42.

glory. The simplicity of the New Testament, the lowly path of the Lord and His apostles, the zeal and self-denial of a Paul all were overlooked, and worldly greatness soon became the object and ambition of the clergy. A brief sketch of the bishop's office will set these things in a clear light, and, we doubt not, will greatly interest our readers.

WHAT WAS A BISHOP IN EARLY TIMES?

The humblest peasant is familiar with the grandeur and worldly greatness of a bishop, but he may not know how a minister of Christ, and a successor of the humble fishermen of Galilee, came to such dignity. In the days of the apostles and for more than a hundred years after, the office of a bishop was a laborious but "good work." He had the charge of a single church, which might ordinarily be contained in a private house. He was not then as a "lord over God's heritage," but in reality its minister and servant, instructing the people, and attending on the sick and poor in person. The presbyters, no doubt, assisted in the management of the general affairs of the church, and also the deacons; but the bishop had the chief part of the service. He had no authority, however, to decree or sanction anything without the approval of the presbytery and people. There was no thought then of "inferior clergy" under him. And at that time the churches had no revenues, except the voluntary contributions of the people, which, moderate as they doubtless were, would leave a very small emolument for the bishop after the poor and needy were attended to.

But in those early times office-bearers in the church continued, in all probability, to carry on their former trades and occupations, supporting themselves and their families in the same manner as before. "A bishop," says Paul, "must be given to hospitality." And this he could not have been, had he depended for his income on the earnings of the poor. It was not until about the year 245 that the clergy received a salary, and were forbidden to follow their worldly employments; but towards the close of the second century circumstances arose in the history of the church, which greatly affected the original humility and simplicity of its overseers, and which tended to the corruption of the priestly order. "This change began," says Waddington, "towards the end of the second century; and it is certain that at this period we find the first complaints of the incipient corruption of the clergy." From the moment that the interests of the ministers became at all distinguished from the interests of Christianity, many and great changes for the worse may be considered to have begun. We will notice some of these circumstances; and first,

THE ORIGIN OF DIOCESES

The bishops who lived in cities, were either by their own preaching, or by the preaching of others — presbyters, deacons, or people — the means of gathering new churches in the neighbouring towns and villages. These young

assemblies, very naturally, continued under the care and protection of the city churches by whose means they had received the gospel, and were formed into churches. Ecclesiastical provinces were thus gradually formed, which the Greeks afterwards denominated **dioceses**. The city bishops claimed the privilege of appointing office-bearers to these rural churches; and the persons to whom they committed their instruction and care were called *district bishops*. These formed a new class, coming in between the bishops and the presbyters, being considered inferior to the former, and superior to the latter. Thus were distinctions and divisions created, and offices multiplied.

THE ORIGIN OF THE METROPOLITAN BISHOP

Churches thus constituted and regulated rapidly increased throughout the empire. In the management of their internal affairs every church was essentially distinct from every other, though walking in spiritual fellowship with all others, and considered as part of the one church of God. But, as the number of believers increased, and churches were extended, diversities in doctrine and discipline sprang up, which could not always be settled in the individual assemblies. This gave rise to councils, or synods. These were composed chiefly of those who took part in the ministry. But when the deputies of the churches were thus assembled, it was soon discovered that the **control of a president** was required. Unless the sovereign action of the Holy Spirit in the church be owned and submitted to, there must be anarchy without a president. The bishop of the capital of the province was usually appointed to preside, under the lofty title of the *Metropolitan*. On his return home it was hard to lay aside these occasional honours, so he very soon claimed the personal and permanent dignity of the *Metropolitan*.

The bishops and presbyters, until about this time, were generally viewed as equal in rank, or the same thing, the terms being used synonymously; but now the former considered themselves as invested with supreme power in the guidance of the church, and were determined to maintain themselves in this authority. The presbyters refused to concede to them this new and self-assumed dignity, and sought to maintain their own independence. Hence arose the great controversy between the presbyterian and the episcopalian systems, which has continued until this day, and of which we may speak more particularly hereafter. Enough has been said to show the reader the beginning of many things which still live before us in the professing church. In the consecrated order of clergy he will find the germ out of which sprang at length the whole mediaeval priesthood, the sin of simony, the laws of celibacy, and the fearful corruptions of the dark ages.⁴²

Having thus glanced at what was going on inside the church from the beginning, and especially amongst her rulers, we will now resume the general history from the death of Marcus Aurelius.

SHORT PAPERS ON CHURCH HISTORY

CHAPTER 9

FROM COMMODUS TILL THE ACCESSION OF CONSTANTINE

A.D. 180-313

Christianity under the successors of Aurelius enjoyed a season of comparative repose and tranquillity. The depravity of **Commodus** was overruled to subserve the interests of the Christians after their long sufferings under his father, and the brief reign of many of the emperors left them no leisure to war against the aggressions of Christianity. “During little more than a century,” says Milman, “from the accession of Commodus to that of Diocletian, more than twenty emperors flitted like shadows along the tragic scene of the imperial palace. The empire of the world became the prize of bold adventure, or the precarious gift of a lawless soldiery. A long line of military adventurers, often strangers to the name, to the race, to the language of Rome — Africans, Pyreans, Arabs and Goths — seized the quickly shifting sceptre of the world. The change of sovereign was almost always a change of dynasty, or, by some strange fatality, every attempt to re-establish a hereditary succession was thwarted by the vices or imbecility of the second generation.”

Thus the Christians had about a hundred years of comparative rest and peace. There were, no doubt, many cases of persecution and martyrdom during that period, but such cases were more the result of personal hostility in some individual than from any systematic policy pursued by the government against Christianity. The first and commanding object of each succeeding emperor was to secure his contested throne. They had no time to devote to the suppression of Christianity, or to the social and religious changes within the empire. Thus the great Head of the church — who is also “head over all things to the church” — made the weakness and insecurity of the throne the indirect means of the strength and prosperity of the church.

But although the reign of Commodus was generally favourable to the progress of Christianity, there was one remarkable instance of persecution which we must note.

Apollonius, a Roman senator, renowned for learning and philosophy, was a sincere Christian. Many of the nobility of Rome, with their whole families, embraced Christianity about this time. The dignity of the Roman senate felt itself lowered by such innovations. This led, it is supposed, to the accusation of Apollonius before the magistrate. His accuser, under an old and unrepealed

⁴² For full details, see Neander, vol. 1, p. 259; Mosheim, vol. 1, p. 91; Bingham, vol. 1.

law of Antoninus Pius, which enacted grievous punishments against the accusers of Christians, was sentenced to death and executed. The magistrate asked the prisoner, Apollonius, to give an account of his faith before the senate and the court. He complied, and boldly confessed his faith in Christ; in consequence of which, by a decree of the senate, he was beheaded. It is said by some to be the only trial recorded in history where both the accused and the accuser suffered judicially. But the Lord's hand was in it, and high above both the accuser and the magistrate, Perennius, who condemned them both. From this period many families of distinction and opulence in Rome professed Christianity, and sometimes we meet with Christians in the imperial family.

After a reign of about twelve years the unworthy son of Aurelius died from the effects of a poisoned cup of wine.

Pertinax, immediately upon the death of Commodus, was elected by the senate to the throne; but after a brief reign of sixty-six days, he was killed in an insurrection. A civil war followed, and Septimius Severus ultimately obtained the sovereign power in Rome.

CHRISTIANITY UNDER THE REIGN OF SEVERUS

A.D. 194-210

In the early part of the reign of Severus he was rather favourable to the Christians. A christian slave, named Proculus, was the means of restoring the Emperor to health, by anointing him with oil. This remarkable cure — no doubt in answer to prayer — gave the Christians great favour in the eyes of Severus. Proculus received an honourable position in the imperial family, and a christian nurse and a christian tutor were engaged to form the character of the young prince. He also protected from the popular indignation men and women of the highest rank in Rome — senators, their wives and families — who had embraced Christianity. But alas! all this favour towards the Christians was merely the result of local circumstances. The laws remained the same, and violent persecutions broke out against them in particular provinces.

PERSECUTIONS UNDER SEVERUS

A.D. 202

It was not till about the tenth year of his reign that the native ferocity of his dark and relentless mind was manifested against the Christians. In 202, after his return from the East, where he had gained great victories, and no doubt lifted up with pride, he put forth his hand, and impiously dared to arrest the progress of Christianity — the chariot of the gospel. He passed a law, which forbade, under severe penalties, that any of his subjects should become either Jews or Christians. This law, as a matter of course, kindled a severe persecution against young converts and Christians in general. It stimulated

their enemies to all kinds of violence. Large sums of money were extorted from timid Christians by some of the venal governors as the price of peace. This practice, though yielded to by some for the sake of life and liberty, was strongly denounced by others. It was considered by the more zealous as degrading to Christianity, and an ignominious barter of the hopes and glories of martyrdom. Still the persecution does not appear to have been general. It left its deepest traces in Egypt and Africa.

At Alexandria, **Leonides**, father of the famous Origen, suffered martyrdom. Young people at schools, who were receiving a christian education, were subjected to severe tortures and some of their teachers were seized and burned. The young Origen distinguished himself at this time by his active and fearless labours in the now almost deserted schools. He longed to follow in his father's footsteps, and rather sought than shunned the crown of martyrdom. But it was in Africa a place we only think of now as a dark, miserable, and thinly peopled desert — that the *silver line* of God's marvellous grace was most distinctly marked in the heavenly patience and fortitude of the holy sufferers. We must indulge our readers with a few brief details.

THE PERSECUTION IN AFRICA

Historians say that in no part of the Roman Empire had Christianity taken more deep and permanent root than in the province of Africa. Then it was crowded with rich and populous cities. The African type of Christianity was entirely different from what has been called the Egyptian. The former was earnest and impassioned, the latter dreamy and speculative through the evil influence of **Platonism**. Tertullian belongs to this period, and is a true type of the difference we have referred to; but more of this farther on. We will now notice some of the African martyrs.

PERPETUA AND HER COMPANIONS

Amongst others who were apprehended and martyred in Africa during this persecution, **Perpetua and her companions**, in all histories, hold a distinguished place. The history of their martyrdom not only bears throughout the stamp of circumstantial truth, but abounds with the most exquisite touches of natural feeling and affection. Here we see the beautiful combination of the tenderest feelings and the strongest affections, which Christianity recognises in all their rights, and makes even more profound and tender, but yet causes all to be sacrificed on the altar of entire devotedness to Him who died entirely devoted to us. "Who loved me," as appropriating faith says, "and gave Himself for me." (Gal. 2:20)

At Carthage, in the year 202, **three young men**, Revocatus, Saturnius, and Secundulus, and two young women, Perpetua and Felicitas, were arrested, all of them being still catechumens, or candidates for baptism and communion. Perpetua was of a good family, wealthy and noble, of liberal education, and

honourably married. She was about twenty-two years of age, and was a mother, with her child at the breast. Her whole family seem to have been Christians except her aged father who was still a pagan. Nothing is said of her husband. Her father was passionately fond of her, and greatly dreaded the disgrace that her sufferings for Christ would bring on his family. So that she had not only death in its most frightful form to struggle with, but every sacred tie of nature.

When she was first brought before her persecutors, her aged father came and urged her to recant and say she was not a Christian. "Father," she calmly replied, pointing to a vessel that lay on the ground, "can I call this vessel anything else than what it is?" "No," he replied. "Neither can I say to you anything else than that I am a Christian." A few days after this the young Christians were baptized. Though they were under guard, they were not yet committed to prison. But shortly after this, they were thrown into the dungeon. "Then," she says, "I was tempted, I was terrified, for I had never been in such darkness before. Oh what a dreadful day! The excessive heat occasioned by the number of persons, the rough treatment of the soldiers, and, finally, anxiety for my child, made me miserable." The deacons, however, succeeded in purchasing for the christian prisoners a better apartment, where they were separated from the common criminals. Such advantages could usually be purchased from the venal overseers of prisons. Perpetua was now cheered by having her child brought to her. She placed it at her breast, and exclaimed, "Now, this prison has become a palace to me!"

After a few days there was a rumour that the prisoners were to be examined. The father hastened to his daughter in great distress of mind. "My daughter," he said, "pity my grey hairs, pity thy father, if I am still worthy to be called thy father. If I have brought thee up to this bloom of thy age, if I have preferred thee above all thy brothers, expose me not to such shame among men. Look upon thy child — thy son who, if thou diest, cannot long survive thee. Let thy lofty spirit give way, lest thou plunge us all into ruin. For if thou diest thus, not one of us will ever have courage again to speak a free word." Whilst saying this, he kissed her hands, threw himself at her feet, entreating her with terms of endearment, and many tears. But, though greatly moved and pained by the sight of her father, and his strong and tender affection for her, she was calm and firm, and felt chiefly concerned for the good of his soul. "My father's grey hairs," she said, "pained me, when I considered that he alone of my family would not rejoice in my martyrdom." "What shall happen," she said to him, "when I come before the tribunal depends on the will of God; for we stand not in our own strength, but only by the power of God."

On the arrival of the decisive hour — **the last day of their trial** — an immense multitude was assembled. The aged father again appeared, that he might for the last time try his utmost to overcome the resolution of his daughter. On this occasion he brought her infant son in his arms, and stood

before her. What a moment! what a spectacle! Her aged father, his grey hairs, her tender infant; to say nothing of his agonising importunities: what an appeal to a daughter — to a young mother's heart! "Have pity on thy father's grey hairs," said the governor, "have pity on thy helpless child, offer sacrifice for the welfare of the Emperor." Thus she stood before the tribunal, before the assembled multitude, before the admiring myriads of heaven, before the frowning hosts of hell. But Perpetua was calm and firm. Like Abraham of old the father of the faithful, her eye was not now on her son but on the God of resurrection. Having commended her child to her mother and her brother, she answered the governor, and said, "That I cannot do." "Art thou a Christian?" he asked. "Yes," she replied, "I am a Christian." Her fate was now decided. They were all condemned to serve as a cruel sport for the people and the soldiers, in a fight with wild beasts, on the anniversary of young Geta's birthday. They returned to their dungeon, rejoicing that they were thus enabled to witness and suffer for Jesus' sake. The jailer, Pudus, was converted by means of the tranquil behaviour of his prisoners

When led forth into the amphitheatre, the martyrs were observed to have a peaceful and joyful appearance. According to a custom which prevailed in Carthage, the men should have been clothed in scarlet like the priests of Saturn, and the women in yellow as the priestesses of Ceres, but the prisoners protested against such a proceeding. "We have come here," they said, "of our own choice, that we may not suffer our freedom to be taken from us; we have given up our lives that we may not be forced to such abominations." The pagans acknowledged the justice of their demand, and yielded. After taking leave of each other with the **mutual kiss of christian love**, in the certain hope of soon meeting again, as "absent from the body and present with the Lord," they came forward to the scene of death in their simple attire. The voice of praise to God was heard by the spectators. Perpetua was singing a psalm. The men were exposed to lions, bears, and leopards; the women were tossed by a furious cow. But all were speedily released from their sufferings by the sword of the gladiator, and entered into the joy of their Lord.

The interesting narrative, which is here abridged, and said to have been written by Perpetua's own hand, breathes such an air of truth and reality as to have commanded the respect and confidence of all ages. But our main object in writing it for our readers is to present to them a living picture, in which many of the finest features of christian faith are beautifully blended with the warmest and tenderest christian feelings, and that we may learn, not to be complainers, but to endure all things for Christ's sake, that so His grace may shine, our faith triumph, and God be glorified.

A few years after these events, Severus turned his attention to **Britain**, where the Romans had been losing ground. The Emperor, being at the head of a very powerful army, drove back the independent natives of Caledonia, and regained the country south of the wall of Antoninus, but lost so many troops in the successive battles which he was obliged to fight, that he did not think

proper to push his conquests beyond that boundary. Feeling at length his end approaching, he retired to York, where he soon expired, in the eighteenth year of his reign, A.D. 211.

THE ALTERED POSITION OF CHRISTIANITY

After the death of Septimius Severus — except during the short reign of **Maximin** — the church enjoyed a season of comparative peace till the reign of Decius, A.D. 249. But during the favourable reign of Alexander Severus, a considerable change took place in the relation of Christianity to society. He was through life under the influence of his mother, Mammaea, who is described by Eusebius as “a woman distinguished for her piety and religion.” She sent for Origen, of whose fame she had heard much, and learnt from him something of the doctrines of the gospel. She was afterwards favourable to the Christians, but there is not much evidence that she was one herself.

Alexander was of a religious disposition. He had many Christians in his household; and bishops were admitted even at the court in a recognised official character. He frequently used the words of our Saviour, “As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.” (Luke 6:31) He had them inscribed on the walls of his palace and on other public buildings. But all religions were nearly the same to him, and on this principle he gave Christianity a place in his eclectic system.

THE FIRST PUBLIC BUILDINGS FOR CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLIES

An important point in the history of the church, and one that proves its altered position in the Roman Empire, now comes before us for the first time. It was during the reign of this excellent prince that public buildings were first erected for the assemblies of Christians. A little circumstance connected with a piece of land in Rome shows the true spirit of the Emperor and the growing power and influence of Christians. This piece of land, which had been considered as a common, was selected by a congregation as a site for a church; but the Company of Victuallers contended that they had a prior claim. The case was judged by the Emperor. He awarded the land to the Christians, on the ground that it was better to devote it to the worship of God in any form than apply it to a profane and unworthy use.

Public buildings — **christian churches**, so-called — now begun to rise in different parts of the empire, and to possess endowments in land. The heathen had never been able to understand why the Christians had neither temples nor altars. Their religious assemblies, up till this time, had been held in private. Even the Jew had his public synagogue, but where the Christians met was indicated by no separate and distinguished building. The private house, the catacombs, the cemetery of their dead, contained their peaceful congregations. Their privacy, which had often been in those troublous times their security, was now passing away. On the other hand, it must also be observed that their

secrecy was often used against them. We have seen from the first, that the pagans could not understand a religion without a temple and were easily persuaded that these private and mysterious meetings, which seemed to shun the light of day, were only for the worst of purposes.

The outward condition of Christianity was now changed wonderfully changed — but alas! not in favour of spiritual health and growth, as we shall soon see. There were now well-known edifices in which the Christians met, and the doors of which they could throw wide open to all mankind. Christianity was now recognised as one of the various forms of worship which the government did not prohibit. But the toleration of the Christians during this period rested only on the favourable disposition of Alexander. No change was made in the laws of the empire in favour of Christians, so that their time of peace was brought to a close by his death. A conspiracy was formed against him by the demoralised soldiery, who could not endure the discipline which he sought to restore; and the youthful Emperor was slain in his tent, in the twenty-ninth year of his age and the thirteenth of his reign.

THE LORD'S DEALINGS WITH THE CLERGY

Scarcely had the new churches been built, and the bishops received at court, when the hand of the Lord was turned against them. It happened in this way.

Maximin, a rude Thracian peasant, raised himself to the imperial throne. He had been the chief instigator, if not the actual murderer of the virtuous Alexander. He began his reign by seizing and putting to death all the friends of the late Emperor. Those who had been *his* friends he reckoned as his own enemies. He ordered the bishops, and particularly those who had been the intimate friends of Alexander, to be put to death. His vengeance fell more or less on all classes of Christians, but chiefly on the clergy. It was not, however, for their Christianity that they suffered on this occasion, for Maximin was utterly regardless of all religions, but because of the position they had reached in the world. What can be more sorrowful than this reflection?

About the same time destructive **earthquakes** in several provinces rekindled the popular hatred against the Christians in general. The fury of the people under such an emperor was unrestrained, and, encouraged by hostile governors, they burnt the newly-built churches and persecuted the Christians. But happily the reign of the savage was of short duration. He became intolerable to mankind. The army mutinied and slew him in the third year of his reign and a more favourable season for the Christians returned.

The reign of **Gordian**, A.D. 238-244, and that of **Philip**, A.D. 244-249, were friendly to the church. But we have repeatedly found that a government favourable to the Christians was immediately followed by another which oppressed them. It was particularly the case at this time. Under the smiles and patronage of Philip the Arabian the church enjoyed great outward prosperity,

but she was on the eve of a persecution more terrible and more general than any she had yet passed through.

One of the causes which may have contributed to this was the absence of the Christians from the national ceremonies which commemorated the **thousandth year of Rome**, A.D. 247. The secular games were celebrated with unexampled magnificence by Philip, but as he was favourable to the Christians, they escaped the fury of the pagan priests and populace. The Christians were now a recognised body in the State, and however carefully they might avoid mingling in the political factions or the popular festivities of the empire, they were considered the enemies of its prosperity and the cause of all its calamities. We now come to a complete change of government — a government that afflicts the whole church of God.

THE GENERAL PERSECUTION UNDER DECIUS

Decius, in the year 249, conquered Philip and placed himself on the throne. His reign is remarkable in church history for the first *general* persecution. The new Emperor was unfavourable to Christianity and zealously devoted to the pagan religion. He resolved to attempt the complete extermination of the former, and to restore the latter to its ancient glory. One of the first measures of his reign was to issue edicts to the governors, to enforce the ancient laws against the Christians. They were commanded, on pain of forfeiting their own lives, to exterminate all Christians utterly, or bring them back by pains and tortures to the religion of their fathers.

From the time of Trajan there had been an imperial order to the effect, that *the Christians were not to be sought for*; and there was also a law against private accusations being brought against them, especially by their own servants, as we have seen in the case of Apollonius, and these laws had been usually observed by the enemies of the church, but now they were wholly neglected. The authorities sought out the Christians, the accusers ran no risk, and popular clamour was admitted in place of formal evidence. During the two succeeding years a great multitude of Christians in all the Roman provinces were banished, imprisoned, or tortured to death by various kinds of punishments and sufferings. This persecution was more cruel and terrible than any that preceded it. But the most painful part of those heart-rending scenes was the enfeebled state of the Christians themselves the sad effect of worldly ease and prosperity.

THE EFFECTS OF WORLDLINESS IN THE CHURCH

The student of church history now meets with the manifest and appalling effect of the world in the church. It is a most sorrowful sight, but it ought to be a profitable lesson to the christian reader. What then was, is now, and ever must be. The Holy Spirit, who dwells in us, is not now less sensitive to the foul and withering breath of the world than He was then.

What the enemy could not do by bloody edicts and cruel tyrants, he accomplished by the friendship of the world. This is an **old stratagem of Satan**. The wily serpent proved more dangerous than the roaring lion. By means of the favour of great men, and especially of emperors, he threw the clergy off their guard, led them to join hands with the world, and deceived them by his flatteries. The Christians could now erect temples as well as the heathen, and their bishops were received at the imperial court on equal terms with the idolatrous priests. This unhallowed intercourse with the world sapped the very foundations of their Christianity. This became painfully manifest when the violent storm of persecution succeeded the long calm of their worldly prosperity.

In many parts of the empire the Christians had enjoyed undisturbed peace for a period of thirty years. This had told unfavourably on the church as a whole. With many it was not now the faith of an ardent conviction, such as we had in the first and second centuries, but of truth instilled into the mind by means of christian education — just what prevails in the present day to an alarming extent. A persecution breaking out with great violence, after so many years of tranquillity, could not fail to prove a sifting process for the churches. The atmosphere of Christianity had become corrupted. Cyprian in the West, and Origen in the East, speak of the secular spirit which had crept in — of the pride, the luxury the covetousness of the clergy — of the careless and irreligious lives of the people.

“If,” says **Cyprian**, bishop of Carthage, “the cause of the disease is understood, the cure of the affected part is already found. The Lord would prove His people; and because the divinely-prescribed regimen of life had become disturbed in the long season of peace, a divine judgment was sent to reestablish our fallen, and, I might almost say, slumbering faith. Our sins deserve more, but our gracious Lord has so ordered it that all which has occurred seems rather like a trial than a persecution. Forgetting what believers did in the times of the apostles, and what they should always be doing Christians laboured with insatiable desire to increase their earthly possessions. Many of the bishops who, by precept and example, should have guided others, neglected their divine calling, to engage in the management of worldly concerns.” Such being the condition of things in many of the churches, we need not wonder at what took place.

The Emperor ordered rigorous search to be made for all suspected of refusing compliance with the national worship. Christians were required to conform to the ceremonies of the pagan religion. In case they declined, threats, and afterwards tortures, were to be employed to compel submission. If they remained firm, the punishment of death was to be inflicted especially on the bishops, whom Decius hated most bitterly. The custom was, wherever the dreadful edict was carried into execution, to appoint a day when all the Christians in the place were to present themselves before the magistrate, renounce their religion, and offer incense at the idol’s altar. Many, before the

dreadful day arrived, had fled into voluntary banishment. The goods of such were confiscated and themselves forbidden to return, under penalty of death. Those who remained firm, after repeated tortures, were cast into prison, when the additional sufferings of hunger and thirst were employed to overcome their resolution. Many who were less firm and faithful were let off without sacrificing, by purchasing themselves, or allowing their friends to purchase, a certificate from the magistrate. But this unworthy practice was condemned by the church as a tacit abjuration.

Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, in describing the effect of this terrible decree, says, “that many citizens of repute complied with the edict. Some were impelled by their fears, and some were forced by their friends. Many stood pale and trembling, neither ready to submit to the idolatrous ceremony, nor prepared to resist even unto death. Others endured their tortures to a certain point, but finally gave in.” Such were some of the painful and disgraceful effects of the general relaxation through tampering with this present evil world. Still it would ill become us, who live in a time of great civil and religious liberty, to say hard things of the weakness of those who lived in such sanguinary times. Rather let us feel the disgrace as our own, and pray that we may be kept from yielding to the attractions of the world in every form. But all was not defective, thank the Lord. Let us look for a moment at the bright side.

THE POWER OF FAITH AND CHRISTIAN DEVOTEDNESS

The same Dionysius tells us that many were as pillars of the Lord, who through Him were made strong, and became wonderful witnesses of His grace. Among these he mentions a boy of fifteen, **Dioscurus** by name, who answered in the wisest manner all questions, and displayed such constancy under torture, that he commanded the admiration of the governor himself, who dismissed him, in the hope that riper years would lead him to see his error. A woman, who had been brought to the altar by her husband, was forced to offer incense by some one holding her hand; but she exclaimed, “I did it not: it was you that did it;” and she was thereupon condemned to exile. In the dungeon at Carthage the Christians were exposed to heat, hunger, and thirst, in order to force them to comply with the decree; but although they saw death by starvation staring them in the face, they continued stedfast in their confession of Christ. And from the prison in Rome, where certain confessors had been confined for about a year, the following noble confession was sent to Cyprian: “What more glorious and blessed lot can, by God’s grace fall to man than, amidst tortures and the fear of death itself, to confess God the Lord — than, with lacerated bodies and a spirit departing but yet free, to confess Christ, the Son of God — than to become fellow-sufferers with Christ in the name of Christ? If we have not yet shed our blood, we are ready to shed it. Pray then, beloved Cyprian, that the Lord would daily confirm and strengthen each one of us, more and more, with the power of His might; and that He, as the best of leaders, would finally conduct His soldiers, whom He

has disciplined and proved in the dangerous camp, to the field of battle which is before us, armed with those divine weapons which never can be conquered.”

Among the victims of this terrible persecution were Fabian, bishop of Rome, Babylas of Antioch, and Alexander of Jerusalem. Cyprian, Origen, Gregory, Dionysius, and other eminent men, were exposed to cruel tortures and exile, but escaped with their lives. The hatred of the Emperor was particularly directed against the bishops. But in the Lord’s mercy the reign of Decius was a short one, he was killed in battle with the Goths, about the end of 251.⁴³

THE MARTYRDOM OF CYPRIAN UNDER VALERIAN

As the name of **Cyprian** must be familiar to all our readers and a name most famous in connection with the government and discipline of the church, it may be well to notice particularly the serene fortitude of this Father in the prospect of martyrdom.

He was born at Carthage about the year 200; but he was not converted till about 246. Though in mature age, he possessed all the freshness and ardour of youth. He had been distinguished as a teacher of rhetoric, he was now distinguished as an earnest devoted Christian. He was early promoted to the offices of deacon and presbyter, and in 248 he was elected bishop by the general desire of the people. His labours were interrupted by the persecution under Decius; but his life was preserved till the year 258. On the morning of the 13th of September, an officer with soldiers was sent by the proconsul to bring him into his presence. Cyprian then knew his end was near. With a ready mind and a cheerful countenance he went without delay. His trial was postponed for a day. The intelligence of his apprehension drew together the whole city. His own people lay all night in front of the officer’s house with whom he was lodged.

In the morning he was led to the proconsul’s palace surrounded by a great multitude of people and a strong guard of soldiers. After a short delay the proconsul appeared. “Art thou Thascius Cyprian, the bishop of so many impious men?” said the proconsul. “I am,” answered Cyprian. “The most sacred Emperor commands thee to sacrifice.” “I do not sacrifice,” he replied. “Consider well,” rejoined the proconsul. “Execute thy orders,” answered Cyprian, “the case admits of no consideration.”

The governor consulted with his council, and then delivered his sentence. “Thascius Cyprian, thou hast lived long in thy impiety, and assembled around thee many men involved in the same wicked conspiracy. Thou hast shown thyself an enemy alike to the gods and to the laws of the empire; the pious and sacred emperors have in vain endeavoured to recall thee to the worship of thy ancestors. Since then thou hast been the chief author and leader of these guilty

⁴³ See Neander, vol. 1, p. 177; Mosheim, vol. 1, p. 217; Milner, vol. 1, p. 332.

practices, thou shalt be an example to those whom thou hast deluded to thy unlawful assemblies. Thou must expiate thy crime with thy blood.” “God be praised!” answered Cyprian, and the crowd of his brethren exclaimed “Let us too be martyred with him.” The bishop was carried into a neighbouring field and beheaded. It was remarkable that but a few days afterwards the proconsul died. And the Emperor Valerian, the following year, was defeated and taken prisoner by the Persians, who treated him with great and contemptuous cruelty — a calamity and disgrace without example in the annals of Rome.

The miserable death of many of the persecutors made a great impression on the public mind, and forced on many the conviction that the enemies of Christianity were the enemies of heaven. For about forty years after this outrage, the peace and prosperity of the church were not seriously interrupted; so that we may pass over these years for the present, and come to the final contest between paganism and Christianity.

THE GENERAL STATE OF CHRISTIANITY

Before attempting a brief account of the persecution under Diocletian, it may be well to review the history and condition of the church as the final struggle drew near. But in order to form a correct judgment of the progress and state of Christianity at the end of three hundred years, we must consider the power of the enemies with which it had to contend.

1. **Judaism.** We have seen at some length, and especially in the life of St. Paul, that *Judaism* was the first great enemy of Christianity. It had to contend from its infancy with the strong prejudices of the believing, and with the bitter malice of the unbelieving, Jews. In its native region, and wherever it travelled, it was pursued by its unrelenting foe. And after the death of the apostles the church suffered much from yielding to Jewish pressure, and ultimately remodelling Christianity on the system of Judaism. The new wine was put into old bottles.

2. **Orientalism.** Towards the close of the first and the beginning of the second century, Christianity had to wend its way through the many and conflicting elements of eastern philosophy. Its first conflict was with *Simon Magus*, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Though a Samaritan by birth, he is supposed to have studied the various religions of the East at Alexandria. On returning to his native country he advanced very high pretensions to superior knowledge and power; and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: to whom they all gave heed from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the great power of God.” From this notice of Simon we may learn what influence such men had over the minds of the ignorant and the superstitious, and also what a dreadful power of Satan the early church had to contend with in these evil workers. He assumed not merely the lofty title of “the great power of God,” but that he combined in

himself the other perfections of Deity. He is spoken of by writers generally as the head and father of the whole host of impostors and heretics.

After being so openly and shamefully defeated by Peter he is said to have left Samaria, and travelled through various countries, choosing especially those which the gospel had not reached. From this time he introduced the name of Christ into his system, and thus endeavoured to confound the gospel with his blasphemies, and confuse the minds of the people. As to his miracle and magic working, his marvellous theories about his own descent from heaven, and other emanations, we say nothing, only that they proved, especially in the East, a mighty hindrance to the progress of the gospel.

The successors of Simon, such as Cerinthus and Valentinus so systematised his theories as to become the founders of that form of **gnosticism** with which the church had to contend in the second century. The name implies *pretensions to some superior knowledge*. It is generally thought that St. Paul refers to this meaning of the word when warning his son Timothy against “science,” or *knowledge*, “falsely so called.”

Although it would be out of place in these “Short Papers” to attempt anything like an outline of this wide-spread **orientalism or gnosticism**, yet we must give our readers some idea of what it was. It proved for a time the most formidable opponent of Christianity. But as the facts and doctrines of the gospel prevailed, gnosticism declined.

Under the head of the gnostics may be included all those in the first ages of the church who incorporated into their philosophical systems the most obvious and suitable doctrines of both Judaism and Christianity. Thus *gnosticism* became a mixture of oriental philosophy, Judaism, and Christianity. By means of this Satanic confusion the beautiful simplicity of the gospel was destroyed, and for a long time, in many places, its real character was obscured. It was a deep-laid plan and a mighty effort of the enemy, not only to corrupt, but to undermine and subvert, the gospel altogether. No sooner had Christianity appeared than the gnostics began to adopt into their systems some of its sublimest doctrines. Judaism was deeply tinged with it before the christian era, probably from the captivity.

But gnosticism, we must remember, was not a corruption of Christianity, though the whole school of gnostics are called *heretics* by ecclesiastical writers. As to its origin, we must go back to the many religions of the East, such as Chaldean, Persian, Egyptian, and others. In our own day such philosophers would be viewed as infidels and utter aliens from the gospel of Christ; but in early times the title *heretic* was given to all who in any way whatever introduced the name of Christ into their philosophical systems. Hence it has been said, “If Mahomet had appeared in the second century, Justin Martyr or Irenaeus would have spoken of him as a heretic.” At the same time we must own that the principles of the Greek philosophy, especially

the Platonic, forced their way at a very early period into the church, corrupted the pure stream of truth, and threatened for a time to change the design and the effects of the gospel upon mankind.

Origen, who was born at Alexandria — the cradle of gnosticism — about the year 185, was the Father who gave form and completeness to the Alexandrian method of interpreting scripture. He distinguished in it a threefold sense — the literal, the moral, and the mystical — answering respectively to the body, soul, and spirit in man. The literal sense, he held, might be understood by any attentive reader; the moral required higher intelligence; the mystical was only to be apprehended through the grace of the Holy Spirit, which was to be obtained by prayer.

It was the great object of this eminent teacher to harmonise Christianity with philosophy, this was the leaven of the Alexandrian school. He sought to gather up the fragments of truth scattered throughout other systems, and unite them in a christian scheme, so as to present the gospel in a form that would not offend the prejudices, but insure the conversion, of Jews, gnostics, and of cultivated heathen. These principles of interpretation, and this combination of Christianity with philosophy, led Origen and his followers into many grave and serious errors, both practical and doctrinal. He was a devoted, earnest, zealous Christian himself, and truly loved the Lord Jesus, but the tendency of his principles has been, from that day to this, to weaken faith in the definite character of truth, if not to pervert it altogether by means of spiritualizing and allegorising, which his system taught and allowed.

The Malignity of Matter was a first principle in all the sects of the gnostics, it pervaded all the religious systems of the East. This led to the wildest theories as to the formation and character of the material universe, and all corporeal substances. Thus it was, that persons believing their bodies to be intrinsically evil recommended abstinence and severe bodily mortifications, in order that the mind or spirit which was viewed as pure and divine, might enjoy greater liberty, and be able the better to contemplate heavenly things. Without saying more on this subject — which we do not much enjoy — the reader will see that the celibacy of the clergy in later years, and the whole system of asceticism and monasticism, had their origin, not in the scriptures, but in oriental philosophy.⁴⁴

Paganism. Not only had the church to contend with Judaism and Orientalism, it also suffered from the outward hostility of *Paganism*. These were the three formidable powers of Satan with which he assailed the church during the first three hundred years of her history. In carrying out her Lord's high commission — "Teach all nations"... "preach the gospel to every creature" — she had these enemies to face and overcome. But these could not

⁴⁴ For minute details of the different sects, see *Dictionary of Christian Churches and Sects*, by Marsden. Robertson, vol. 1. 94. Neander, vol. 2, 387. Milman, vol. 2, 80. Mosheim, vol. 1, 117.

have hindered her course, had she only walked in separation from the world and remained true and faithful to her heavenly and exalted Saviour. But alas! alas! what Judaism, Orientalism, and Paganism could not do, the allurements of the world accomplished. And this leads us to a close survey of the condition of the church when the great persecution broke out.

A SURVEY OF THE CONDITION OF THE CHURCH

A.D. 303

Diocletian ascended the throne in 284. In 286 he associated with himself Maximian, as Augustus, and in 292 Galerius and Constantius were added to the number of the princes with the inferior title of Caesar. Thus, when the fourth century began, the Roman empire had four sovereigns. Two bore the title of Augustus; and two, the title of Caesar. Diocletian, though superstitious, indulged no hatred towards Christians. Constantius, the father of Constantine the Great was friendly to them. At first the face of christian affairs looked tolerably bright and happy, but the pagan priests were angry, and plotting mischief against the Christians. They saw in the wide-spreading triumphs of Christianity their own downfall. For fully fifty years the church had been very little disturbed by the secular power. During this period Christians had attained an unexampled degree of prosperity; but it was only outward: they had deeply declined from the purity and simplicity of the gospel of Christ.

Churches had arisen in most of the cities of the empire, and with some display of architectural splendour. Vestments and sacred vessels of silver and gold began to be used. Converts flocked in from all ranks of society; even the wife of the Emperor, and his daughter Valeria, married to Galerius, appear to have been among the number. Christians held high offices in the state, and in the imperial household. They occupied positions of distinction, and even of supreme authority, in the provinces and in the army. But alas! this long period of outward prosperity had produced its usual consequences. Faith and love decayed; pride and ambition crept in. Priestly domination began to exercise its usurped powers, and the bishop to assume the language and the authority of the vicegerent of God. Jealousies and dissensions distracted the peaceful communities, and disputes sometimes proceeded to open violence. The peace of fifty years had corrupted the whole christian atmosphere: the lightning of Diocletian's rage was permitted of God to refine and purify it.

Such is the melancholy confession of the Christians themselves, who, according to the spirit of the times, considered the dangers and the afflictions to which they were exposed in the light of divine judgments.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Milman, vol. 2. 261.

THE ACTS OF DIOCLETIAN AND THE CLOSE OF THE SMYRNEAN PERIOD

Already the church has passed through nine systematic persecutions. The first was under Nero, then Domitian Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, Severus, Maximin, Decius, Valerian, Aurelian. And now the fearful moment has arrived when she must undergo the **Tenth**, according to the prophetic word of the Lord: "Ye shall have tribulation **Ten** days." And it is not a little remarkable that not only should there be exactly *ten* government persecutions, but that the last should have continued exactly **Ten** years. And, as we saw at an earlier part of the Smyranean period, exactly **Ten** years elapsed from the beginning of the persecution, under Aurelius, in the East, till its close in the West. The christian student may trace other features of resemblance: we would rather *suggest* such features than *press* their acceptance upon others, though we surely believe they are foreshadowed in the Epistle to Smyrna.

The reign of **Diocletian** is one of great historical importance. First, it was rendered conspicuous by the introduction of a new system of imperial government. He virtually removed the capital from ancient Rome to Nicomedia, which he made the seat of his residence. There he maintained a court of eastern splendour, to which he invited men of learning and philosophy. But the philosophers who frequented his court, being all animated with extreme hatred against Christianity, used their influence with the Emperor to exterminate a religion too pure to suit their polluted minds. This led to the last and greatest persecution of the Christians. It is only with the latter we have to do. And as all histories of this period are gathered chiefly from the records of Eusebius and Lactantius, who wrote at this time, and witnessed many executions, we can do little more than select and transcribe from what has been already written, consulting the various authors already named.

The pagan priests and philosophers above referred to, not succeeding well in their artifices with Diocletian to make war against the Christians, made use of the other Emperor, Galerius, his son-in-law, to accomplish their purpose. This cruel man, impelled partly by his own inclination, partly by his mother, a most superstitious pagan, and partly by the priests, gave his father-in-law no rest until he had gained his point.

During the winter of the year 302-303 **Galerius** paid a visit to Diocletian at Nicomedia. His great object was to excite the old Emperor against the Christians. Diocletian for a time withstood his importunity. He was averse, from whatever motive, to the sanguinary measures proposed by his partner. But the mother of Galerius, the implacable enemy of the Christians, employed all her influence over her son to inflame his mind to immediate and active hostilities. Diocletian at length gave way, and a persecution was agreed to: but the lives of the Christians were to be spared. Previously to this, Galerius had

taken care to remove from the army all who refused to sacrifice. Some were discharged, and some were sentenced to death.

THE FIRST EDICT

About the 24th of February the *first* edict was issued. It ordained that all who refused to sacrifice should lose their offices, their property, their rank, and civil privileges; that slaves persisting in the profession of the gospel should be excluded from the hope of liberty, that Christians of all ranks should be destroyed, that religious meetings should be suppressed, and that the scriptures should be burnt. The attempt to **exterminate the scriptures** was a new feature in this persecution, and, no doubt, was suggested by the philosophers who frequented the palace. They were well aware that their own writings would have but little hold on the public mind if the scriptures and other sacred books were circulated. Immediately these measures were resolved upon the church of Nicomedia was attacked, the sacred books were burnt, and the building entirely demolished in a few hours. Throughout the empire the churches of the Christians were to be levelled to the ground, and the sacred books were to be delivered to the imperial officers. Many Christians who refused to give up the scriptures were put to death, while those who gave them up to be burnt were considered by the church as traitors to Christ, and afterwards caused great trouble in the exercise of discipline towards them.⁴⁶

No sooner had this cruel edict been affixed in the accustomed place than a Christian of noble rank tore it down. His indignation at injustice so flagrant hurried him into an act of inconsiderate zeal — into a violation of that precept of the gospel which enjoins respect towards all in authority. Welcome was the occasion thus furnished to condemn a Christian of high station to death. He was burnt alive at a slow fire, and bore his sufferings with a dignified composure which astonished and mortified his executioners. The persecution was now begun. The first step against the Christians having been taken, the second did not linger.

Not long after the publication of the edict, a fire broke out in the palace of Nicomedia, which spread almost to the chamber of the Emperor. The origin of the fire appears to be unknown, but of course, the guilt was charged on the Christians. Diocletian believed it. He was alarmed and incensed. Multitudes were thrown into prison, without discrimination of those who were or were not liable to suspicion, the most cruel tortures were resorted to for the purpose of extorting a confession; but in vain. Many were burnt to death, beheaded and drowned. About fourteen days after, a second fire broke out in

⁴⁶ It may interest the reader to know that no MSS of the New Testament are extant older than the middle of the fourth century. One fact which accounts for this in great measure is the destruction of the christian writings, the scriptures especially, in the reign of Diocletian during the earlier part of that century. Under Constantine it is known that special efforts were made to have correct copies made, of which the celebrated critic Tischendorf believes the Sinai MS to be one.

the palace. It now became evident that it was the work of an incendiary. The heathen again accused the Christians, and loudly cried for vengeance, but as no proof could ever be found that the Christians had any hand in any way with these fatal conflagrations, a strong, and, we believe, truthful suspicion rested on the Emperor Galerius himself. His great object from the first was to incriminate the Christians, and alarm Diocletian by his own more violent measures. As if fully aware of the effect of these events on the dark, timid, and superstitious mind of the old Emperor, he immediately left Nicomedia, pretending that he could not consider his person safe within the city.

But the end was gained, and that to the utmost extent which even Galerius or his pagan mother could have desired. Diocletian, now thoroughly aroused, raged ferociously against all sorts of men and women who bore the christian name. He compelled his wife Prisca, and his daughter Valeria, to offer sacrifice. Officers of the household, of the highest rank and nobility, and all the inmates of the palace, were exposed to the most cruel tortures, by the order, and even in the presence, of Diocletian himself. The names of some of his ministers of state have been handed down who preferred the riches of Christ to all the grandeur of his palace. One of the chamberlains was brought before the Emperor and was tortured with great severity, because he refused to sacrifice. As if to make an example of him to the others, a mixture of salt and vinegar was poured on his open wounds, but it was all to no purpose. He confessed his faith in Christ as the only Saviour, and would own no other God. He was then gradually burnt to death. Dorotheus, Gorgonius, and Andreas, eunuchs who served in the palace were put to death. Anthimus, the bishop of Nicomedia, was beheaded. Many were executed, many were burnt alive, but it became tedious to destroy men singly, and large fires were made to burn many together, others were rowed into the midst of the lake, and thrown into the water with stones fastened to their necks.

From **Nicomedia**, the centre of the persecution, the imperial orders were despatched, requiring the cooperation of the other emperors in the restoration of the dignity of the ancient religion, and the entire suppression of Christianity. Thus the persecution raged throughout the whole Roman world, excepting Gaul. There the mild Constantius ruled, and, though he made a show of concurring in the measure of his colleagues, by the demolition of the churches, he abstained from all violence against the persons of the Christians. Though not himself a decided Christian, he was naturally humane, and evidently a friend to Christianity and its professors. He presided over the government of Gaul, Britain, and Spain. But the fierce temper of Maximian, and the savage cruelty of Galerius, only awaited the signal to carry into effect the orders from Nicomedia. And now the three monsters raged, in the full force of the civil power against the defenceless and inoffending followers of the meek and lowly Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

“Grace begun shall end in glory;
Jesus, He the victory won

In His own triumphant story
Is the record of our own.”

THE SECOND EDICT

Not long after the first edict had been carried into execution throughout the empire, rumours of insurrections in Armenia and Syria, regions densely peopled with Christians, reached the Emperor's ears. These troubles were falsely attributed to the Christians, and afforded a pretext for a second edict. It was intimated that the clergy, as leaders of the Christians, were particularly liable to suspicion on this occasion, and the edict directed that all of the clerical order should be seized and thrown into prison. Thus in a short time prisons were filled with bishops, presbyters, and deacons.

THE THIRD EDICT

A third edict was immediately issued prohibiting the liberation of any of the clergy, unless they consented to offer sacrifice. They were declared enemies of the State; and wherever a hostile prefect chose to exercise his boundless authority, they were crowded into prisons intended only for the basest criminals. The edict provided that such of the prisoners as were willing to offer sacrifice to the gods should be set free, and that the rest should be compelled by tortures and punishments. Great multitudes of the most devout godly, and venerable in the church, either suffered capitally or were sent to the mines. The Emperor vainly thought, that if the bishops and teachers were once overcome, the churches would soon follow their example. But finding that the most humiliating defeat was the result of his measures, he was goaded on by the united influence of Galerius, the philosophers, and the pagan priesthood, to issue another and a still more rigorous edict.

THE FOURTH EDICT

By a fourth edict the orders which applied only to the clergy were now to be extended to the whole body of Christians. The magistrates were directed to make free use of torture for forcing *all* Christians — men, women, and children — into the worship of the gods. Diocletian and his colleagues were now committed to the desperate but unequal contest. The powers of darkness — the whole Roman empire — stood, *armed*, determined, pledged, to the defence of ancient polytheism, and to the **complete extermination of the christian name**. To retreat would be the confession of weakness, to be successful the adversary must be exterminated; as to victory there could be none, for the Christians made no resistance, Historically, it was the final and fearful struggle between paganism and Christianity; the contest was now at its height, and drawing to a crisis.

Public proclamation was made through the streets of the cities, that men, women, and children, were all to repair to the temples of the gods. All must

undergo the fiery ordeal — sacrifice or die. Every individual was summoned by name from lists previously made out. At the city gates all were subjected to rigid examination, and such as were found to be Christians were immediately secured

Details of the sufferings and martyrdoms that followed would fill volumes. As edict followed edict, in rapid succession and in wrathful severity, the spirit of martyrdom revived; it rose higher and higher, until men and women, in place of being seized and dragged to the funeral piles, leaped into the burning flames, as if ascending to heaven in a chariot of fire. Whole families were put to various kinds of death; some by fire, others by water, after enduring severe tortures, some perished by famine, others by crucifixion, and some were fastened with their heads downwards, and preserved alive, that they might die a lingering death. In some places as many as ten, twenty, sixty, and even a hundred men and women, with their little ones, were martyred by various torments in one day.⁴⁷

In almost every part of the Roman world such scenes of pitiless barbarity continued with more or less severity for the long period of ten years. Constantius alone, of all the emperors, contrived to shelter the Christians in the west, especially in Gaul, where he resided. But in all other places they were given up to all sorts of cruelties and injuries without the liberty to appeal to the authorities, and without the smallest protection from the State. Free leave was given to the heathen populace to practise all sorts of excesses against the Christians. Under these circumstances the reader may easily imagine what they were constantly exposed to both in their persons and estates. Each one felt sure of never being called to account for any violence he might be guilty of towards the Christians. But the sufferings of the men, however great, seemed little compared with those of the women. The fear of exposure and violence was more dreaded than mere death.

Take one example. “**A certain holy and devout female,**” says Eusebius, “admirable for her virtue, and illustrious above all in Antioch for her wealth, family, and reputation had educated her two daughters — now in the bloom of life noted for their beauty — in the principles of piety. Their concealment was traced, and they were caught in the toils of the soldiery. The mother, being at a loss for herself and her daughters, knowing what was before them, suggested that it was better to die, betaking themselves to the aid of Christ, than fall into the hands of the brutal soldiers. After this, all agreeing to the same thing, and having requested the guards for a little time, they cast themselves into the flowing river to escape a greater evil.” Although this act cannot be fully justified, it must be judged with many considerations. They were driven to despair. And sure we are that the Lord knows how to forgive all that is wrong in the action, and to give us full credit for all that is right in our motives.

⁴⁷ For the names and particulars of many of the sufferers, see Milner, vol. 1, pp. 473-506.

For a moment the persecutors vainly imagined that they would triumph over the downfall of Christianity. Pillars were raised, and **medals were struck**, to the honour of Diocletian and Galerius, for having extinguished the christian superstition, and for restoring the worship of the gods. But He who sits in heaven was at that very moment overruling the very wrath of these men for the complete deliverance and triumph of His people, and the acknowledged defeat and downfall of their enemies. They could martyr Christians, demolish churches, and burn books; but the living springs of Christianity were beyond their reach.

THE HAND OF THE LORD IN JUDGMENT

Great and important changes began to take place in the sovereignty of the empire. But the Head of the church watched over everything. He had limited and defined the period of her sufferings, and neither the hosts of hell, nor the legions of Rome, could extend these one hour. The enemies of the Christians were smitten with the direst calamities. God appeared to be making requisition for blood. Galerius, the real author of the persecution, in the eighteenth year of his reign and the eighth of the persecution, lay expiring of a most loathsome malady. Like Herod Agrippa and Philip II of Spain, he was “eaten of worms.” Physicians were sought for oracles were consulted, but all in vain, the remedies applied only aggravated the virulence of the disease. The whole palace was so infected from the nature of his affliction, that he was deserted by all his friends. The agonies which he suffered forced from him the cry for mercy, and also an earnest request to the Christians to intercede for the suffering Emperor in their supplications to their God.

From his dying bed he issued an edict, which, while it condescended to apologise for the past severities against the Christians, under the specious plea of regard for the public welfare and unity of the state, admitted to the fullest extent the total failure of the severe measures for the suppression of Christianity; and provided for the free and public exercise of the christian religion. A few days after the promulgation of the edict Galerius expired. For about six months the merciful orders of this edict were acted upon, and great numbers were liberated from the prisons and the mines; but, alas! bearing the marks of bodily torture only short of death. This brief cessation of the persecution showed at once its fearful character and alarming extent.

But **Maximin**, who succeeded Galerius in the government of Asia, sought to revive the pagan religion in all its original splendour, and the suppression of Christianity, with renewed and relentless cruelty. He commanded that all the officers of his government, from the highest to the lowest both in the civil and military service that all free men and women, all slaves, and even little children, should sacrifice and even partake of what was offered at heathen altars. All vegetables and provisions in the market were to be sprinkled with the water or the wine which had been used in the sacrifices, that the Christians might thus be forced into contact with idolatrous offerings.

New tortures were invented, and fresh streams of christian blood flowed in all the provinces of the Roman empire, with the exception of Gaul. But the hand of the Lord was again laid heavily both on the empire and on the Emperor. Every kind of calamity prevailed. Tyranny, war, pestilence, and famine depopulated the Asiatic provinces. Throughout the dominions of Maximin the summer rains did not fall; a famine desolated the whole East, many opulent families were reduced to beggary, and others sold their children as slaves. The famine produced its usual accompaniment pestilence. Boils broke out all over the bodies of those who were seized with the malady, but especially about the eyes, so that multitudes became helplessly and incurably blind. All hearts failed, and all who were able fled from the infected houses; so that myriads were left to perish in a state of absolute desertion. The Christians, moved by the love of God in their hearts, now came forward to do the kind offices of humanity and mercy. They attended the living, and decently buried the dead. Fear fell upon all mankind. The heathen concluded their calamities to be the vengeance of heaven for persecuting its favoured people.

Maximin was alarmed, and endeavoured, when too late, to retrace his steps. He issued an edict, avowing the principles of toleration, and commanding the suspension of all violent measures against the Christians, and recommending only mild and persuasive means to win back these apostates to the religion of their forefathers. Having been defeated in battle by Licinius, he turned his rage against the pagan priests. He charged them with having deceived him with false hopes of victory over Licinius, and of universal empire in the East, and now revenged his disappointment by a promiscuous massacre of all the pagan priests within his power. His last imperial act was the promulgation of another edict still more favourable to the Christians, in which he proclaimed an unrestricted liberty of conscience, and restored the confiscated property of their churches. But death came and closed the dark catalogue of his crimes, and the dark line of persecuting emperors, who died of the most excruciating torments, and under the visible hand of divine judgment. Many names, of great celebrity both for station and character, are among the martyrs of this period, and many thousands, unknown and unnoticed on earth but whose record is on high, and whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Thus closed the most memorable of all the attacks of the powers of darkness on the christian church, and thus closed the last hope of paganism to maintain itself by the authority of the government. The account of the most violent, most varied, most prolonged, and most systematic attempt to exterminate the gospel ever known, well deserves the space we have given to it, so that we offer no apology for its length. We have seen the arm of the Lord lifted up in a gracious but solemn manner to chastise and purify His church, to demonstrate the imperishable truth of Christianity, and to cover with everlasting shame and confusion her daring but impotent foes. Like Moses, we may exclaim, "Behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burned. And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to

see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush.” Thus we see why the bush was not burned, or Israel in Egypt not consumed, or the church in this world not exterminated: God was in the midst of the bush He is in the midst of His church — it is the habitation of God through the Spirit. Besides, Christ hath plainly said, referring to Himself in His risen power and glory, “Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Ex. 3; Matt. 16)

SHORT PAPERS ON CHURCH HISTORY

CHAPTER 10

CONSTANTINE

The reign of **Constantine the Great** forms a most important epoch in the history of the church. Both his father Constantius and his mother Helena were religiously inclined, and always favourable to the Christians. Some years of Constantine's youth were spent at the court of Diocletian and Galerius in the character of a hostage. He witnessed the publication of the persecuting edict at **Nicomedia in 303**, and the horrors which followed. Having effected his escape, he joined his father in Britain. In 306 Constantius died at York. He had nominated as his successor his son Constantine, who was accordingly saluted **Augustus** by the army. He continued and extended the toleration which his father had bestowed on the Christians.

There were now **six pretenders** to the sovereignty of the empire — Galerius, Licinius, Maximian, Maxentius, Maximin and Constantine. A scene of contention followed, scarcely paralleled in the annals of Rome. Among these rivals, Constantine possessed a decided superiority in prudence and abilities, both military and political. In the year 312 Constantine entered Rome victorious. In 313 a new edict was issued, by which the persecuting edicts of Diocletian were repealed, the Christians encouraged, their teachers honoured, and the professors of Christianity advanced to places of trust and influence in the state. This great change in the history of the church introduces us to

THE PERGAMOS PERIOD A.D. 313-606

The Epistle to the church in **Pergamos** exactly describes, we believe, the state of things in Constantine's time. But we will quote the address entire for the convenience of our readers, and then compare it: "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast My name, and hast not denied My faith, even in those days wherein **Antipas** was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold **the doctrine of Balaam**, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold **the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes**, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and

will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.” (Rev. 2: 12-17)

In Ephesus we see the first point of departure, leaving their “first love” — the heart slipping away from Christ, and from the enjoyment of His love. In **Smyrna** the Lord allowed the saints to be cast into the furnace, that the progress of declension might be stayed. They were persecuted by the heathen. By means of these trials Christianity revived, the gold was purified, the saints held fast the name and the faith of Christ. Thus was Satan defeated; and the Lord so ruled that the emperors, one after the other, in the most humiliating and mortifying circumstances, publicly confessed their defeat. But in Pergamos the enemy changes his tactics. In place of persecution from without, there is seduction from within. Under Diocletian he was **the roaring lion**, under Constantine he is **the deceiving serpent**. Pergamos is the scene of Satan’s flattering power; he is within the church. **Nicolaitanism** is the corruption of grace — the flesh acting in the church of God. In Smyrna he is outside as an adversary, in Pergamos he is inside as a seducer. This was exactly what took place under Constantine.

Historically, it was when the violence of persecution had spent itself — when men had grown weary of their own rage, and when they saw that their efforts were to no purpose that the sufferers ceased to care for the things of the world, and became more devoted to Christianity; while even the numbers of the Christians seemed to increase; Satan tries another and an old artifice, once so successful against Israel. (Num. 25) When he could not obtain the Lord’s permission to curse His people Israel, he allured them to their ruin, by unlawful alliances with the daughters of Moab. As a false prophet he was now in the church at Pergamos, seducing the saints into unlawful alliance with the world — the place of his throne and authority. The world ceases to persecute; great advantages are held out to Christians by the civil establishment of Christianity; Constantine professes to be converted, and ascribes his triumphs to the virtues of the cross. The snare alas! is successful, the church is flattered by his patronage, shakes hands with the world, and sinks into its position — **“even where Satan’s seat is.”** All was now lost **as to her** corporate and proper testimony, and **the way to popery laid open**. Every worldly advantage was no doubt gained; but alas! alas! it was at the cost of the honour and glory of her heavenly Lord and Saviour.

The church, we must remember, is an *outcalling* (Acts 15:14) — called out from Jew and Gentile to witness that she was not of this world, but of heaven — that she is united to a glorified Christ, and not of this world, even as *He is* not of this world. So He says Himself, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth. As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.” (John 17)

The Christian's mission is on the same principle and of the same character as was Christ's. "As My Father hath sent Me," He says, "*even so send I you.*" They were sent, as it were, from heaven to the world by the blessed Lord, to do His will, to care for His glory, and to return home when their work was done. Thus the Christian should be the *heavenly* witness of the truth of God, especially of such truths as man's total ruin, and God's love in Christ to a perishing world; and thereby should seek to gather souls out of the world, that they may be saved from the wrath to come. But when we lose sight of our high calling, and associate with the world as if we belonged to it, we become false witnesses; we do the world a great injury, and Christ a great dishonour. This, we shall see by-and-by, was what the church did as to her *corporate* position and action. Doubtless there were many cases of individual faithfulness in the midst of the general declension. The Lord Himself speaks of His faithful **Antipas** who was martyred. Heaven takes special notice of individual faithfulness, and remembers the faithful by name.

But the eye and the heart of the Lord had followed His poor faithless church to where she had fallen. "I know thy works," He says, "and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is." What solemn words are these, and from the lips of her dishonoured Lord! Nothing was hidden from His eye. I *know*, He says; I have seen what has happened. But what alas! had now taken place? Why, the church as a body had accepted the Emperor's terms, was now **united to the State**, and was dwelling in the world. This was Babylon spiritually — committing fornication with the kings of the earth. But He who walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks judges her action and her condition. "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, These things saith He which hath the sharp sword with two edges." He takes the place of one who was armed with the divine sword — with the all-searching, piercing, power of the word of God. The sword is the symbol of that by which questions are settled; whether it be the carnal sword of the nations or "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

It has been often said, that there is always a marked and instructive connection between the way in which Christ presents Himself, and the state of the church which He is addressing. This is most true in the present address. The word of God evidently had lost its right place in the assembly of His saints; it was no longer the supreme authority in divine things. But the Lord Jesus takes care to show that it had not lost its power, or place, or authority in His hands. "Repent" He says, "or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth." He does not say, observe, I will fight against *thee* but against *them*. As exercising discipline in the church the Lord acts with discrimination and with mercy. The public position of the church was now a false one. There was open association with the prince of this world, in place of faithfulness to Christ, the Prince of heaven. But he that had an ear to hear what the Spirit said unto the church, had secret fellowship with Him who sustains the faithful soul with the hidden manna. "To him that

overcometh will I give to eat of **the hidden manna**, and will give him a **white stone**, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." The general defection would, no doubt isolate the faithful few — a remnant. To them the promise is given.

The manna, as we learn from John 6, represents Christ Himself, as He came down from heaven to give life to our souls. "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever." As the lowly One who took the place of humiliation in this world, He is our provision for the daily walk through the wilderness. The manna was to be gathered daily, fresh from the dewdrops every morning. The "*hidden manna*" refers to **the golden pot of manna** that was laid up in the ark as a memorial before the Lord. It is the blessed remembrance of Christ who was the humbled, suffering Man in this world, and who is the eternal delight of God, and of the faithful in heaven. Not only has the true-hearted saint communion with Christ as exalted on high, but with Him as the once humbled Jesus here below. But this cannot be if we are listening to the flatteries and accepting the favours of the world. Our only strength against the spirit of the world is walking with a rejected Christ, and feeding on Him as our portion even now. Our high privilege is to eat, not of the manna only, but of the "*hidden manna*." But who can speak of the blessedness of such communion, or of the loss of those who slip away in heart from Christ, and settle down in worldliness?

The "white stone" is a secret mark of the Lord's special favour. As the promise is given in the address to Pergamos it may mean the expression of Christ's approval of the way the "**overcomers**" witnessed and suffered for Him, when so many were led away by the seductions of Satan. It gives the general idea of a secret pledge of entire approbation. But it is difficult to explain. The heart may enter into its blessedness and yet feel unable to describe it. Happy they who so know it for themselves. There are joys which are common to all, but there is a joy, a special joy, which will be our own peculiar joy in Christ, and that for ever. This will be true of all. "And in the stone **a new name written**, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." What an unknown source of calm repose, sweet peace, true contentment, and divine strength, we find in the "white stone," and in the "new name," written by His own hand. Others may misunderstand us, many may think us wrong, but He knows all, and the heart can afford to be quiet, whatever may be passing around. At the same time we must judge everything by the word of God — the sharp sword with two edges — even as we ourselves are judged.

“There on the hidden bread
Of Christ — once humbled here —
God's treasured store — for ever fed,
His love my soul shall cheer.

Called by that secret name

Of undisclosed delight
Blest answer to reproach and shame —
Graved on the stone of white.”

Having thus briefly glanced at the Epistle to Pergamos, we shall be better able to understand the mind of the Lord as to the conduct of Christians under the reign of Constantine. The professing church and the world had joined hands, and were now enjoying themselves together. As the world could not rise to the high level of the church, she must fall to the low level of the world. This was exactly what took place. Nevertheless the fair form of Christianity was maintained, and there were doubtless many who held fast the faith and the name of Jesus. We now return to the conversion and history of Constantine the Great.

THE CONVERSION OF CONSTANTINE

A.D. 312

The great event in the religious history of Constantine took place in 312. He was marching from France to Italy against **Maxentius**. The approaching contest was one of immense moment. It was likely either to be his ruin or to raise him to the highest pinnacle of power. He was in deep thought. It was known that Maxentius was making great preparations for the struggle, by enlarging his army, and by scrupulously attending to all the customary ceremonies of paganism. He consulted with great pains the heathen oracles, and relied for success on the agency of supernatural powers.

Constantine, though a wise and virtuous heathen, was a heathen still. He knew what he had to give battle to; and while considering to what god he should betake himself for protection and success, he thought on the ways of his father **the Emperor of the West**. He remembered that he prayed to the God of the Christians and had always been prosperous, while the emperors who persecuted the Christians had been visited with divine justice. He resolved therefore to forsake the service of idols, and to ask the aid of the one true God in heaven. He prayed that God would make Himself known to him, and that He would make him victorious over Maxentius, notwithstanding all his magical arts and superstitious rites.

While engaged in such thoughts, Constantine imagined that he saw, soon after mid-day, some extraordinary appearance in the heavens. It assumed the sign of a glittering cross and above it the inscription, **“By This Conquer.”** The Emperor and the whole army, who were witnesses of this wonderful sight, stood awestruck. But while the Emperor was gravely meditating on what the vision could signify night came on, and he fell asleep. He dreamed that the Saviour appeared to him, bearing in His hand the same sign which he had seen in the heavens, and directed him to cause a banner to be made after the same pattern, and to use it as his standard in war, assuring him that while he did so

he would be victorious. Constantine, on awakening, described what had been shown to him while asleep, and resolved to adopt the sign of the cross as his imperial standard.

THE BANNER OF THE CROSS

According to **Eusebius**, the workers in gold and precious stones were immediately sent for, and received their orders from the lips of Constantine. Eusebius had seen the standard and gives a long account of it. As the greatest interest has been thrown around this relic of antiquity by all ecclesiastical writers, we will give our readers a brief but minute sketch of it.

The shaft, or perpendicular beam, was long, and overlaid with gold. On its top was a crown, composed of gold and precious stones, with the engraving of the sacred symbol of the cross and the first letters of the Saviour's name, or the Greek letter X intersected with the letter P.⁴⁸ Just under this crown was a likeness of the Emperor in gold, and below that a cross-piece of wood, from which hung a square flag of purple cloth, embroidered and covered with precious stones. It was called the **Labarum**. This resplendent standard was borne at the head of the imperial armies, and guarded by fifty chosen men, who were supposed to be invulnerable from its virtues.

Constantine now sent for christian teachers, of whom he inquired concerning the God that appeared to him, and the import of the symbol of the cross. This gave them an opportunity of directing his mind to the word of God, and of instructing him in the knowledge of Jesus and of His death on the cross. From that time the Emperor declared himself a convert to Christianity. The superstitious hopes and confidence of Constantine and his army were now raised to the highest pitch. The decisive battle was fought at **the Milvian bridge**. Constantine gained a signal victory over his enemy, though his troops did not number one-fourth of the troops of Maxentius.

THE EDICT OF CONSTANTINE AND LICINIUS

A.D. 313

The victorious Emperor paid a short visit to Rome. Amongst other things which he did, he caused to be erected in the forum a statue of himself, holding in his right hand a standard in the shape of a cross, with the following inscription: "By this salutary sign, the true symbol of valour, I freed your city from the yoke of the tyrant." Maxentius was found in the Tiber the morning after the battle. The Emperor evidently felt that he was indebted to the God of the Christians and to the sacred symbol of the cross for his victories. And this, we dare say, was the extent of his Christianity at that time. As a *man* he had not felt his need of it, if ever he did, as a warrior he embraced it earnestly. Afterwards, as a statesman, he owned and valued Christianity; but God only

⁴⁸ (Christos), Christ.

knows whether as a lost sinner he ever embraced the Saviour. It is difficult for princes to be Christians.

Constantine now proceeded towards **Illyricum** to meet **Licinius**, with whom he had formed a secret alliance before going to meet Maxentius. The two emperors met at **Milan**, where their alliance was ratified by the marriage of Licinius to Constantine's daughter. It was during this quiet moment that Constantine prevailed upon Licinius to consent to the repeal of the persecuting edicts of Diocletian, and the issuing of a new edict of complete toleration. This being agreed upon, a public edict, in the joint names of Constantine and Licinius, was issued at **Milan, A.D. 313**, in favour of the Christians, and may be considered as the great charter of their liberties. Full and unlimited toleration was granted to them; their churches and property were restored without compensation; and, outwardly, Christianity flourished.

But peace between the emperors, which seemed to be established on a firm foundation, was soon interrupted. Jealousy, love of power, and ambition for absolute sovereignty in the Roman empire, would not allow them to remain long in peace. A war broke out in the year 314, but Licinius was defeated with heavy losses, both in men and territory. A peace was again concluded, which lasted about nine years. Another war became unavoidable, and once more it assumed the form of a religious strife between the rival emperors. Licinius attached the pagan priesthood to his cause, and persecuted the Christians. Many of the bishops he put to death, knowing they were special favourites at the court of his rival. Both parties now made preparations for a contest the issue of which should be final. Licinius, before proceeding to war, sacrificed to the gods, and extolled them in a public oration. Constantine, on the other hand, relied upon the God whose symbol accompanied his army. The two hostile armies met. The battle was fierce, obstinate, and sanguinary. Licinius was no mean rival, but the commanding genius, activity, and courage of Constantine prevailed. The victory was complete. Licinius survived his defeat only about a year. He died, or rather was privately killed, in 326. Constantine had now reached the height of his ambition. He was sole master — absolute sovereign of the Roman empire, and continued so until his death in 337. For a description of the political and military career of this great prince we must refer the reader to civil history; we will briefly glance at his religious course.

THE RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF CONSTANTINE

All that we know of the religion of Constantine up to the period of his conversion, so-called, would imply that he was outwardly, if not zealously, a pagan. Eusebius himself admits that he was at this time in doubt which religion he would embrace. Policy, superstition, hypocrisy, divine inspiration, have been in turn assigned as the sole or the predominant influence, which decided his future religious history. But it would surely be unjust to suppose that his profession of Christianity, and his public declarations in its favour,

amounted to nothing more than deliberate and intentional hypocrisy. Both his religious and ecclesiastical course admit of a far higher and more natural explanation. Neither could we believe that there was anything approaching to divine inspiration, either in his midday vision or in his midnight dream. There may have been some unusual appearance about the sun or in the clouds, which imagination converted into a miraculous sign of the cross; and the other appearance may have been the exaggeration of a dream from his highly excited state: but the whole story may now be considered as a fable, full of flattery to the great Emperor, and very gratifying to his great admirer and panegyrist, Eusebius. Few will now be found to give it a place among the authentic records of history.

Policy and superstition, we have no doubt, had a great deal to do with the change that was wrought in the mind of Constantine. From his youth he had witnessed the persecution of the Christians and must have observed a vitality in their religion which rose above the power of their persecutors, and survived the downfall of all other systems. He had seen one emperor after another, who had been the open enemies of Christianity, die the most fearful death. His father only — of all the emperors — the protector of Christianity during the long persecution, had gone down to an honoured and peaceful grave. Facts so striking could not fail to influence the superstitious mind of Constantine. Besides, he might appreciate with political sagacity the *moral* influence of Christianity, its tendency to enforce peaceful obedience to civil government; and the immense hold which it obviously had on the mind of something like the one-half of his empire.

The Emperor's motives, however, are no part of our history, and need not occupy us longer. But, in order to have this most important period or great turning-point in church history clearly before our minds, it may be well to look at the state of the church as he found it in 313, and as he left it in 337.

THE CHURCH AS CONSTANTINE FOUND HER

Up to this time the church had been perfectly free and independent of the state. She had a divine constitution direct from heaven — and outside the world. She made her way, not by state patronage, but by divine power, against every hostile influence. In place of receiving support from the civil government, she had been persecuted from the first as a foreign foe, as an obstinate and pestilent superstition. **Ten times** the devil had been permitted to stir up against her the whole Roman world, which ten times had to confess weakness and defeat. Had she kept in mind the day of her espousals, and the love of Him who says, "No man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church," she never would have accepted the protection of Constantine at the cost of her fidelity to Christ. But the church as a whole was now much mixed up with the world, and far away from her first love.

We have already seen, that since the days of the apostles there had been a growing love of the world, and of outward display. This tendency, so natural to us all, the Lord in love checked by allowing Satan to persecute. But in place of the church accepting the trial as chastening from the hand of the Lord, and owning her worldliness, she grew weary of the place and path of rejection, and thinking she might still please and serve the Lord, and walk in the sunshine of the world. This Satanic delusion was accomplished by Constantine, though he knew not what he was doing. “Whatever the motives of his conversion,” says Milman, “Constantine, no doubt, adopted a wise and judicious policy, in securing the alliance, rather than continuing the strife, with an adversary which divided the wealth, the intellect, if not the property and the population of the empire.”

THE UNION OF THE CHURCH AND STATE

In the month of March 313, the banns of the unholy alliance between the Church and the State were published at Milan. The celebrated edict of that date conferred on the Christians the fullest toleration, and led the way to the legal establishment of Christianity, and to its ascendancy over all other religions. This was publicly displayed on the new imperial standard — **the Labarum**. Besides the initials of Christ,⁴⁹ and the symbol of His cross, there was also an image of the Emperor in gold. These signs, or mottoes, were intended as objects of worship for both heathen and christian soldiers and to animate them to enthusiasm in the day of battle. Thus he who is called the great christian Emperor **publicly united Christianity to idolatry**.

But if we have read the mind of Constantine aright, we should have no hesitation in saying, that at this time he was a heathen in heart, and a Christian only from military motives. It was only as a superstitious soldier that he had embraced Christianity. At that moment he was ready to welcome the assistance of any tutelary divinity in his struggles for universal empire. We can see no trace of Christianity, far less any trace of the zeal of a new convert: but we can easily trace the old superstition of heathenism in the new dress of Christianity. Were it not for such considerations, the Labarum would have been the display of the most daring dishonour to the blessed Lord. But it was done in ignorance. He was also anxious to meet the mind of his heathen soldiers and subjects, and to dissipate their fears as to the safety of their old religion.

The earlier edicts of Constantine, though in their effects favourable to Christianity, were given in such cautious terms as not to interfere with the rights and liberties of paganism. But the Christians gradually grew in his favour, and his acts of kindness and liberality spoke louder than edicts. He not only restored to them the civil and religious rights of which they had been deprived, the churches and estates which had been publicly confiscated in the

⁴⁹ The letters usually employed to represent the Saviour's name are, I.H.S., which mean *Jesu Hominum Salvator* — Jesus the Saviour of men.

Diocletian persecution; but enabled them, by his own munificent gifts, to build many new places for their assemblies. He showed great favour to the bishops and had them constantly about him in the palace, on his journeys, and in his wars. He also showed his great respect for the Christians, by committing the education of his son **Crispus** to the celebrated **Lactantius, a Christian**. But with all this royal patronage he assumed a supremacy over the affairs of the church. He appeared in the synods of the bishops without his guards, mingled in their debates, and controlled the settlement of religious questions. From this time forward **the term Catholic** was invariably applied, in all official documents, to the church.

CONSTANTINE AS HEAD OF THE CHURCH AND HIGH PRIEST OF THE HEATHEN

After the total defeat of Licinius already referred to, the whole Roman world was reunited under the sceptre of Constantine. In his proclamation issued to his new subjects in the East, he declares himself to be the instrument of God for spreading the true faith, and that God had given him the victory over all the powers of darkness, in order that His own worship by his means might be universally established. "Freedom," he says, in a letter to Eusebius, "being once more restored, and, by the providence of the great God and my own ministry, that dragon driven from the ministration of the State, I trust that the divine power has become manifest to all, and that they, who through fear or unbelief have fallen into many crimes, will come to the knowledge of the true God, and to the right and true ordering of their lives." Constantine now took his place more openly to the whole world as the head of the church; but at the same time retained the office of the **Pontifex Maximus** — the high priest of the heathen; this he never gave up, and he died head of the church and high priest of the heathen.

This unholy alliance, or unhallowed mixture of which we have spoken, and which is referred to and mourned over in the address to Pergamos, meets us at every step in the history of this great historical prince. But having given some explanation of the address, we must leave the reader to compare the truth and the history in a godly way. What a mercy to have such a guide in studying this remarkable period in the history of the church!

Among the first acts of the now sole Emperor of the world was **the repeal of all the edicts of Licinius against the Christians**. He released all prisoners from the dungeon or the mine, or the servile and humiliating occupation to which they had been contemptuously condemned. All who had been deprived of their rank in the army or in the civil service he restored, and restitution was made for the property of which they had been despoiled. He issued an edict addressed to all his subjects, advising them to embrace the gospel, but pressed none; he wished it to be a matter of conviction. He endeavoured, however, to render it attractive by bestowing places and honours on proselytes of the higher classes and donations on the poor — a

course which, as Eusebius acknowledges, produced a great amount of hypocrisy and pretended conversion. He ordered that churches should be everywhere built, of a size sufficient to accommodate the whole population. He forbade the erection of statues of the gods, and would not allow his own statue to be set up in the temples. All state sacrifices were forbidden, and in many ways he exerted himself for the elevation of Christianity and the suppression of heathenism.

THE EFFECTS OF ROYAL FAVOUR

We now come to the consideration of that which has been the great historical problem to men of all creeds, nations and passions; namely, whether the State which seeks to advance Christianity by the worldly means at its command, or the earthly power which opposes it by legal violence, does the greater injury to the church and people of God on the earth? Much may be said, we admit, as to the great blessing of impartial toleration, and of the great advantages to society of the legal suppression of all wicked customs; but court favour has always been ruinous to the true prosperity of the church of God. It is a great mercy to be unmolested, but it is a greater mercy to be unpatronised by princes. The true character of Christians is that of **strangers and pilgrims** in this world. The possession of Christ, and of Christ in heaven has changed everything on earth to Christians. They belong to heaven, they are strangers on earth. They are the servants of Christ *in* the world, though not *of* it. **Heaven is their home**; here they have no continuing city. What has the church to expect from a world that crucified her Lord? or rather, what would she accept from it? Her true portion here is suffering and rejection; as the apostle says, "For Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." The Lord may spare His people, but if trial should come, we are not to think that some strange thing has happened to us. "In the world ye shall have tribulation." (Rom. 8:36; John 16:33)

THE WITNESS OF HISTORY

But even from history, we think it can be proved that it was better for Christianity when Christians were suffering at the stake for Christ, than when they were feasted in kings' palaces and covered with royal favours. By way of illustrating our question, we will give our readers a page from the history of the great persecution under Diocletian, and one from the brightest days of Constantine; and we will quote both from Milman, late Dean of St. Paul's, who will not be suspected of unfairness to the clergy. We speak of the faithful only. It is well-known that in the later persecutions, when the assemblies of Christians had greatly increased, many proved unfaithful in the day of trial, though these were comparatively few, and many of them afterwards repented.

"The persecution had now lasted for six or seven years (309), but in no part of the world did Christianity betray any signs of decay. It was far too deeply rooted in the minds of men, far too extensively promulgated, far too

vigorously organized, not to endure this violent but unavailing shock. If its public worship was suspended, the believers met in secret, or cherished in the unassailable privacy of the heart, the inalienable rights of conscience. But of course the persecution fell most heavily upon the most eminent of the body. Those who resisted to death were animated by the presence of multitudes, who, if they dared not applaud, could scarcely conceal their admiration. Women crowded to kiss the hems of the martyrs' garments, and their scattered ashes, or unburied bones, were stolen away by the devout zeal of their flocks.”

Under the edict issued from the dying bed of Galerius the persecution ceased, and the Christians were permitted the free and public exercise of their religion. This breathing-time lasted only a few months. But how grand the sight which followed, and what a testimony to the truth and power of Christianity! The Dean goes on to say:

“The cessation of the persecution showed at once its extent. The prison doors were thrown open, the mines rendered up their condemned labourers, everywhere long trains of Christians were seen hastening to the ruins of their churches, and visiting the places sanctified by their former devotions. The public roads, the streets, and market places of the towns were crowded with long processions singing psalms of thanksgiving for their deliverance. Those who had maintained their faith under these severe trials received the affectionate congratulations of their brethren; those who had failed in the hour of affliction hastened to confess their failure and seek for re-admission into the now joyous fold.”

We now turn to the altered state of things under Constantine, about **twenty years after the death of Galerius**. Mark the mighty change in the position of the clergy.

“The bishops appeared as regular attendants upon the court, the internal dissensions of Christianity became affairs of state. The prelate ruled, not now so much by his admitted superiority in christian virtue, as by the inalienable authority of his office. He opened or closed the door of the church, which was tantamount to an admission to or an exclusion from everlasting bliss, he uttered the sentences of excommunication, which cast back the trembling delinquent amongst the lost and perishing heathen. He had his throne in the most distinguished part of the christian temple, and though yet acting in the presence and in the name of his college of presbyters, yet he was the acknowledged head of a large community, over whose eternal destiny he held a vague but not therefore less imposing and awful dominion.”⁵⁰

Intellectual and philosophical questions took the place of the truth of the gospel, and mere outward religion for faith love, and heavenly-mindedness. A

⁵⁰ *History of Christianity*, vol. 2, p. 283-308. Neander, vol. 3, p. 41. *Life of Constantine*, by Eusebius.

crucified Saviour, true conversion, justification by faith alone, separation from the world, were subjects never known by Constantine, and probably never introduced in his presence. "The connection of the physical and moral world had become general topics; they were, for the first time, the primary truths of a popular religion, and naturally could not withdraw themselves from the alliance with popular passions. Mankind, even within the sphere of Christianity, retrograded to the sterner Jewish character; and in its spirit, as well as its language, the Old Testament began to dominate over the gospel of Christ."

THE TRUE CHARACTER OF THE CHURCH DISAPPEARS

However agreeable to mere nature the sunshine of the imperial favour might be, it was destructive of the true character of the individual Christian and of the church corporately. All testimony to a rejected Christ on earth, and an exalted Christ in heaven was gone. It was the world baptised, in place of believers only as dead and risen with Christ — as having died in His death, and risen again in His resurrection. The word of God is plain: — "Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead." (Col. 2:12) Baptism is here used as the sign both of death and resurrection. But to whom was that solemn and sacred ordinance now administered? Again, we repeat, To the Roman world. Faith in Christ, the forgiveness of sins acceptance in the Beloved, were not looked for by the obsequious clergy.

The profession of Christianity being now the sure way to wealth and honours, all ranks and classes applied for baptism. At the **Easter** and **Pentecostal festivals**, thousands, all clothed in the white garments of the neophyte, crowded round the different churches, waiting to be baptised. The numbers were so great, and the whole scene so striking, that many thought these conspicuous neophytes must be the innumerable multitude spoken of in the Revelation, who stood before the Lamb, clothed with white robes. According to some writers, as many as twelve thousand men, beside women and children, were baptised in one year in Rome, and a white garment, with twenty pieces of gold, was promised by the Emperor to every new convert of the poorer classes. Under these circumstances, and by these venal means, the downfall of heathenism was accomplished, and Christianity seated on the throne of the Roman world.

THE BAPTISM AND DEATH OF CONSTANTINE

The baptism of Constantine has given rise to almost as much speculation as his conversion. Notwithstanding the great zeal he displayed in favour of Christianity, he delayed his baptism, and consequently his reception into the church, till the approach of death. Many motives, both political and personal, have been suggested by different writers as reasons for this delay; but the real one, we fear, was *personal*. Superstition had by this time taught men to

connect the forgiveness of sins with the rite of baptism. Under this dreadful delusion Constantine seems to have delayed his baptism until he could no longer enjoy his imperial honours, and indulge his passions in the pleasures of the world. It is impossible to conceive of any papal indulgence more ruinous to the soul, more dishonouring to Christianity, or more dangerous to every moral virtue. It was a licence for such as Constantine to pursue the great objects of his ambition through the darkest paths of blood and cruelty, as it placed in his hands the means of an easy forgiveness, when convenient to himself. But on the other hand we think it was a great mercy of the Lord, that one, whose private and domestic life, as well as his public career, was so stained with blood, should not have made a public profession of Christianity by receiving baptism and the Lord's supper. Let us hope that he really repented on his deathbed.

The bishops, whom he summoned in his last illness to the palace of **Nicomedia**, heard his confession, were satisfied and gave him their blessing. Eusebius, bishop of Nicomedia baptised him! He now professed for the first time, that if God spared his life, he would join the assembly of His people, and that, having worn the white garment of the neophyte, he would never again wear the purple of the emperor. But these resolutions were too late in coming: he died shortly after his baptism, in the year 337.⁵¹

Helena, the Emperor's mother, deserves a passing notice. She embraced the religion professed by her son. Her devotion, piety, and munificence were great. She travelled from place to place; visited the scenes which had been hallowed by the chief events of scripture history; ordered the temple of Venus to be demolished, which Hadrian had built on the site of the holy sepulchre, and gave directions for a church to be built on the spot, which should exceed all others in splendour. **She died A.D. 328.**

We have now seen, alas! too plainly, the sorrowful truth of the Lord's words, that the church was dwelling where Satan's seat is. Constantine left it there. He found it imprisoned in mines, dungeons, and catacombs, and shut out from the light of heaven; he left it on the throne of the world. But the picture is not yet complete, we must notice other features in the history, answering to the likeness in the Epistle.

The reign of Constantine was marked, not only by the church being taken out of her right place, through the deceptions of Satan, but by the bitter fruits of that degrading change. The seeds of error, corruption, and dissension sprang up rapidly, and now came publicly before the tribunals of the world, and in some instances before the pagan world.

⁵¹ Eusebius's *Life of Constantine*, p. 147.

THE DONATISTIC AND ARIAN CONTROVERSIES

Two great controversies — the **Donatistic** and the **Arian** had their beginning in this reign: the former, arising in the West, from a disputed appointment to the episcopal dignity at Carthage: the latter, of Eastern origin, and involving the very foundations of Christianity. The latter was a question of **doctrine**, the former of **practice**. Both were now corrupted in their very springs and essence, and may have been represented by the false prophet and the Nicolaitanes; but more as to this afterwards. We will now briefly notice the two schisms, as they throw light on the nature and results of the union of church and State. The Emperor took part in the councils of the bishops as head of the church.

On the death of **Mensurius, bishop of Carthage**, a council of neighbouring bishops was called to appoint his successor. The council was small — through the management of Botrus and Celesius, two presbyters who aspired to the office — but **Caecilian**, the deacon who was much loved by the congregation, was elected bishop. The two disappointed persons protested against the election. Mensurius died when absent from Carthage on a journey; but before leaving home he had entrusted some plate and other property of the church to certain elders of the congregation, and had left an inventory in the hands of a pious female. This was now delivered to Caecilian, as he of course demanded the articles from the elders, but they were unwilling to deliver them up, as they had supposed no one would ever inquire for them, the old bishop being dead. They now joined the party of Botrus and Celesius, in opposition to the new bishop. The schism was also supported by the influence of **Lucilla**, a rich lady whom Caecilian had formerly offended by a faithful reproof; and the whole province assumed the right of interference.

Donatus, bishop of Cosae Nigrae, placed himself at the head of the Carthaginian faction. **Secundus**, primate of Numidia, at the summons of Donatus, appeared in Carthage at the head of seventy bishops. This self-installed council cited Caecilian before them, alleging that he ought not to have been consecrated except in their presence and by the primate of Numidia; and inasmuch as he had been consecrated by a bishop who was a **Traditor**⁵², the council declared his election void. Caecilian refused to acknowledge the authority of the council; but they proceeded to elect **Majorinus** to the see, declared to be vacant by the excommunication of Caecilian. But, unfortunately for the credit of the bishops, Majorinus was a member of Lucilla's household who, to support the election, gave large sums of money, which the bishops divided among themselves. A decided schism was now formed, and many persons who before stood aloof from Caecilian, returned to his communion.

⁵² “A name of infamy given to those who, to save their lives in the persecution, had delivered the scriptures or goods of the church to the persecuting powers.” Milner, vol. 1, p. 513.

Some reports of these discords reached the ears of Constantine. He had just become master of the West; and had sent a large sum of money for the relief of the African churches. They had suffered greatly during the late persecutions. But as the **Donatists** were considered *sectaries*, or *dissenters* from the true Catholic church, he ordered that the gifts and privileges conferred on the Christians by the late edicts should be confined to those in communion with Caecilian. This led the Donatists to petition the Emperor, desiring that their cause might be examined by the bishops of Gaul, from whom it was supposed that impartiality might be expected. Here for the first time we have an application to the civil power, to appoint a Commission of Ecclesiastical Judges.

Constantine agreed: a council was held at Rome in 313, consisting of about twenty bishops. The decision was in favour of Caecilian, who thereupon proposed terms of reconciliation and reunion; but the Donatists disdained all compromise. They prayed the Emperor for another hearing declaring that a synod of twenty bishops was insufficient to overrule the sentence of seventy who had condemned Caecilian. On this representation Constantine summoned another council. The number of bishops present was very large, from Africa, Italy, Sicily, Sardinia, but especially from Gaul. This was the greatest ecclesiastical assembly which had yet been seen. They met at Arles, in 314. Caecilian was again acquitted, and several canons were passed with a view to the African dissensions.

In the meantime Majorinus died, and a second Donatus was appointed his successor. He was surnamed by his followers “the Great,” for the sake of distinction from the first Donatus. He is described as learned, eloquent, of great ability, and as possessing the energy and fiery zeal of the African temperament. The sectaries, as they were called, now assumed the name of *the Donatists*, and took their *character* as well as their name from their chief.

CONSTANTINE AS ARBITER OF ECCLESIASTICAL DIFFERENCES

The Emperor was again entreated to take up their cause, and on this occasion to take the matter entirely into his own hands, to which he agreed, though offended by their obstinacy. He heard the case at Milan in the year 316; where he gave sentence in accordance with the councils of Rome and Arles. He also issued edicts against them, which he afterwards repealed, from seeing the dangerous consequences of violent measures. But Donatism soon became a fierce, widespread, and intolerant schism in the church. As early as 330 they had so increased that a synod was attended by two hundred and seventy bishops, in some periods of their history they numbered about four hundred. They proved a great affliction to the provinces of Africa for above three hundred years — indeed down to the time of **the Mahometan invasion**.

REFLECTIONS ON THE FIRST GREAT SCHISM IN THE CHURCH

As this was the first schism that divided the church, we have thought it well to give a few details. The reader may learn some needed lessons from this memorable division. It began with an incident so inconsiderable in itself that it scarcely deserves a place in history. There was no question of bad doctrine or of immorality, but only of a disputed election to **the see of Carthage**. A little right feeling; a little self-denial, a true desire for the peace, unity, and harmony of the church; and above all, a proper care for the Lord's glory, would have prevented hundreds of years of inward sorrow and outward disgrace to the church of God. But pride, avarice, and ambition — sad fruits of the flesh — were allowed to do their fearful work. The reader will also see, from the place that the Emperor had in the councils of the church, how soon her position and character were utterly changed. How strange it must have appeared to Constantine that, immediately on his adopting the cross as his standard, an appeal should be made from an episcopal decision on ecclesiastical matters to his own tribunal! This proved the condition of the clergy. But mark the consequences which such an appeal involves; if the party against whom the sentence of the civil power is given refuse to yield, they become transgressors against the laws. And so it was in this case.

The Donatists were henceforth treated as offenders against the imperial laws; they were deprived of their churches many of them suffered banishment and confiscation. Even the punishment of death was enacted against them, although it does not appear that this law was enforced in any case during the reign of Constantine. Strong measures, however were resorted to by the State, with the view of compelling the Donatists to reunite with the Catholics, but, as is usual in such cases, and as experience has taught ever since, the force that was used to compel them only served to develop the wild spirit of the faction that already existed in the germ. Aroused by persecution, stimulated by the discourses of their bishops, and especially by Donatus who was the head and soul of his party, they were hurried on to every species of fanaticism and violence.

Constantine, taught by experience, at length found that although he could give the church protection, he could not give her peace; and issued an edict, granting to the Donatists full liberty to act according to their own convictions, declaring that this was a matter which belonged to the judgment of God.⁵³

THE ARIAN CONTROVERSY

Scarcely had the outward peace of the church been secured by the edict of Milan, when it was distracted by internal dissensions. Shortly after the breaking out of the Donatist schism in the province of Africa, the *Arian controversy* which had its origin in the East, extended to every part of the

⁵³ Neander, vol. 3, p. 244; Robertson, vol. 1, p. 175; Milman, vol. 2, p. 364.

world. We have already spoken of these angry contentions as the bitter fruit of the unscriptural union of the church with the State. Not that they necessarily sprang from that union, but from Constantine becoming the avowed and ostensible head of the church, and presiding in her solemn assemblies, questions of doctrine and practice produced an agitation throughout the whole church, and not the church only, but they exercised a powerful political influence on the affairs of the world. This was unavoidable from the new position of the church. The empire being now christian, at least in principle, such questions were of world-wide interest and importance. Hence the Arian controversy was the *first* that rent asunder the whole body of Christians, and arrayed in almost every part of the world the hostile parties in implacable opposition.

Heresies, similar in nature to that of Arius, had appeared in the church before her connection with the State; but their influence seldom extended beyond the region and period of their birth. After some noisy debates and angry words were discharged, the heresy fell into dishonour, and was soon almost forgotten. But it was widely different with the Arian controversy. Constantine, who sat upon the throne of the world, and assumed to be the sole head of the church, interposed his authority, in order to prescribe and define the precise tenets of the religion he had established. The word of God, the will of Christ, the place of the Spirit, the heavenly relations of the church, were all lost sight of, or rather had never been seen, by the Emperor. He had probably heard something of the numerous opinions by which the Christians were divided; but he saw, at the same time, that they were a community who had continued to advance in vigour and magnitude; that they were really united in the midst of heresies, and strong under the iron hand of oppression. But he could not see, neither could he understand, that then, spite of her failure, she was looking to the Lord and leaning on Him only in the world. Every other hand was against her, and was led on by the craft and power of the enemy. But, professedly, she was going up through the wilderness leaning on her Beloved, and no weapon formed against her could prosper.

The Emperor, being entirely ignorant of the heavenly relation of the church, may have thought that as he could give her complete protection from outward oppression, he could also by his presence and power give her peace and rest from inward dissensions. But he little knew that the latter was not only far beyond his reach, but that the very security, worldly ease, and indulgence, which he so liberally granted to the clergy, were the sure means of fomenting discords, and of inflaming the passions of the disputants. And so it turned out, he was continually assailed by the complaints and mutual accusations of his new friends.

THE BEGINNING OF ARIANISM

Arianism was the natural growth of the Gnostic opinions; and Alexandria the hotbed of metaphysical questions and subtle distinctions, its birthplace. Paul of

Samosata, and Sabellius of Libya, in the third century, taught similar false doctrines to Arius in the fourth. The Gnostic sects in their different varieties, and the *Manichean*, which was the Persian religion with a mixture of Christianity, may be considered rather as rival religions, than as christian factions nevertheless they did their evil work among Christians as to the doctrine of the Trinity. Nearly all of these heresies as they are usually called, had fallen under the royal displeasure, and their followers subjected to penal regulations. The *Montanists*, *Paulites*, *Novatians*, *Marcionites*, and *Valentinians* were amongst the proscribed and persecuted sects. But there was another, a deeper, a darker, and a much more influential heresy than had yet arisen, about to burst forth and that from the very bosom of the so-called holy Catholic church. It happened in this way.

Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria in a meeting of his presbyters, appears to have expressed himself rather freely on the subject of the Trinity; when *Arius*, one of the presbyters, questioned the truth of Alexander's positions, on the ground that they were allied to the Sabellian errors, which had been condemned by the church. This disputation led Arius to state his own views of the Trinity, which were substantially the denial of the Saviour's Godhead — that He was, in fact, only the first and noblest of those created beings whom God the Father formed out of nothing — that, though immeasurably superior in power and in glory to the highest created beings, He is inferior in both to the Father. He also held, that though inferior to the Father in nature and in dignity, He is the image of the Father, and the vicegerent of the divine power by whom He made the worlds. What his views were of the Holy Spirit are not so plainly stated.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ The blasphemous doctrine of Arius was an offshoot of Gnosticism, perhaps the least offensive in appearance, but directly and inevitably destructive of the personal glory of the Son as God, and hence overthrowing the basis of redemption. Modern Unitarianism denies the Lord Jesus to be more than man, and thus even His supernatural birth of the Virgin Mary; though Socinus asserted the singular modification of such an exaltation after His resurrection as constituted Him an adequate object of divine worship. Arius seemed to approach the truth on the side of His pre-existence before He came into the world, owned that He the Son of God, made the universe but manifested that He was Himself created, though the very first and highest of creatures. It was not the Sabellian denial of distinct personality, but the refusal to the Son, and of course to the Spirit, of true, proper, essential, and eternal Deity.

Not only is Arianism fundamentally inconsistent with the place given to the Son from first to last throughout scripture, as well as with the infinite work of reconciliation and new creation, for which the old creation furnished but the occasion, but it is distinctly refuted beforehand by many passages of holy writ. A few of these it may be well here to cite. Him who, when born of woman, was named Jesus, the Spirit of God declares (John 1: 1-3) to be in the beginning the Word who was with God and was God. "All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made." Impossible to conceive a stronger testimony to His uncreated subsistence, to His distinct personality when He was with God before creation, and to His divine nature. He is here spoken of as the Word, the correlate of which is not the Father, but God (and thus leaving room for the Holy Spirit); but, lest His own consubstantiality should be overlooked He is carefully and at once declared to be God. Go back beyond time and the creature, as far as one may in thought, "in the beginning was the Word." The language is most precise; He was in the beginning with God, not $\epsilon\gamma\epsilon\nu\epsilon\tau\omicron$, "He

Alexander, indignant at the objections of Arius to himself, and because of his opinions, accused him of blasphemy. “The impious Arius,” he exclaimed, “the forerunner of Antichrist had dared to utter his blasphemies against the divine Redeemer.” He was judged by two councils assembled at Alexandria, and cast out of the church. He retired into Palestine, but in nowise discouraged by the disgrace. Many sympathised with him, among whom were the two prelates named Eusebius: one of Caesarea, the ecclesiastical historian, the other, bishop of Nicomedia, a man of immense influence. Arius kept up a lively correspondence with his friends, veiling his more offensive opinions; and Alexander issued warnings against him, and refused all the intercessions of his friends to have him restored. But Arius was a crafty antagonist. He is described in history as tall and graceful in person; calm, pale, and subdued in countenance; of popular address, and an acute reasoner; of strict and blameless life, and agreeable manners; but that, under a humble and mortified exterior, he concealed the strongest feelings of vanity and ambition. The

was” in the sense of coming into being or caused to be, but ην, “He was” in His own absolute being. All things εγενετο, “came into being,” through Him. He was the Creator so completely that St. John adds, “and without Him not one thing came into being which is come into being.” On the other hand, when the incarnation is stated in verse 14, the language is, The Word was made flesh, not ην but εγενετο. Further, when come among men, He is described as “the only-begotten Son ‘who is’ [ο ων, not merely who *was*] in the bosom of the Father” — language unintelligible and misleading, unless to show that His manhood in no way detracted from His Deity, and that the infinite nearness of the Son with the Father ever subsists.

The absence of the article here is necessarily due to the fact that Θεος is the predicate of ο Λογος, in no way to an inferior sense of His Godhead, which would contradict the context itself. Indeed, if the article had been inserted, it would be the grossest heterodoxy, because its effect would be to deny that the Father and the Spirit are God by excluding all but the Word from Godhead.

Again, Romans 9:5 is a rich and precise expression of Christ’s underivative and supreme Godhead equally with the Father and the Spirit. Christ came, “who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.” The efforts of heterodox critics bear witness to the all-importance of the truth, which they vainly essay to shake by unnatural efforts which betray the dissatisfaction of their authors. There is no such emphatic predication of supreme Deity in the Bible: not, of course, that the Father and the Holy Spirit are not co-equal, but because the humiliation of the Son is incarnation and the death of the cross made it fitting that the fullest assertion of divine supremacy should be used of Him.

Next, the apostle says of Christ, “who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature; for by Him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him and for Him; and He is before all things, and By Him all things consist [*subsist*].” (Col. 1: 15-17) The reveries of the Gnostics are here anticipatively cut off; for Christ is shown to have been chief of all creation *because* He was Creator, and this of the highest invisible beings as well as of the visible: all things are said to have been created for Him as well as by Him; and as He is before all, so all subsist together in virtue of Him.

The only other passage I need now refer to is Hebrews 1, where the apostle illustrates the fulness of Christ’s Person among other Old Testament scriptures by Psalms 45 and 102. In the former He is addressed as God and anointed as man; in the latter He is owned as Jehovah, the Creator, after He is heard pouring out His affliction as the rejected Messiah to Jehovah.

It is impossible then to accept the Bible without rejecting Arianism as a heinous libel against Christ and the truth; for it is not more certain that He became a man than that He was God before creation Himself the Creator, the Son, and Jehovah. — *From unpublished MSS of W.K.*

adversary had skilfully selected his instrument. The apparent possession of so many virtues fitted him for the enemy's purpose. Without these fair appearances he would have had no power to deceive.

CONSTANTINE'S FIRST IMPRESSION OF THE CONTROVERSY

The dissension soon became so violent, that it was judged necessary to appeal to the Emperor. He at first considered the whole question as utterly trifling and unimportant. He wrote a letter to Alexander and Arius jointly, in which he reproves them for contending about idle questions and imaginary differences, and recommends them to suppress all unhallowed feelings of animosity, and to live in peace and unity.⁵⁵ It is more than probable that the Emperor had not thought of the serious nature of the dispute, or he could not have spoken of it as trifling and unimportant: but if the letter was drawn up by Hosius, bishop of Cordova, as is generally believed, *he* could not plead ignorance of its character; and must have framed the document according to the expressed feelings of Constantine, rather than according to his own judgment. The letter has been highly extolled by many as a model of wisdom and moderation, and, had the matter been of no graver importance than fixing the time for the Easter festival, it might have deserved that praise; but the Godhead and the glory of Christ were in question, and consequently the salvation of the soul.

Hosius was sent to Egypt as the imperial commissioner, to whom the settlement of the affair was committed. But he found that the dissensions occasioned by the controversy had become so serious, that both parties refused to listen to the admonitions of the bishop, though accompanied with the authority of the sovereign.

⁵⁵ See the Letter in Eusebius's *Life of Constantine*, 2. 64-72.

SHORT PAPERS ON CHURCH HISTORY

CHAPTER 11

THE COUNCIL OF NICE

Constantine was now obliged to look more closely into the nature of the dispute. He began to understand that the question was not one of trifling, but of the highest and most essential, importance; and resolved to convoke an assembly of bishops, in order to establish the true doctrine, and to allay for ever, as he vainly hoped, this propensity to hostile disputation. Everything necessary for their journey was provided at the public charge, as if it had been an affair of State.

In the month of June, A.D. 325, the first general council of the church assembled at **Nice** in Bithynia. About three hundred and eighteen bishops were present, besides a very large number of priests and deacons. "The flower of the ministers of God," as Eusebius says, "from all the churches which abound in Europe, Africa and Asia, now met together." The spectacle was altogether new, and surely to none more so than to the bishops themselves. Not many years had elapsed since they had been marked as the objects of the most cruel persecution. They had been chosen on account of their eminence, as the peculiar victims of the exterminating policy of the government. Many of them bore in their bodies the marks of their sufferings for Christ. They had known what it was to be driven into exile; to work in the mines; to be exposed to every kind of humiliation and insult; but now all was changed, so changed, that they could scarcely believe that it was a reality and not a vision. The palace gates were thrown open to them, and the Emperor of the world acted as moderator of the assembly.

Nothing could so confirm and declare to the world the sad fall of the church, and her subjection to the State, as the place which the Emperor had in these councils. He did not arrive at Nice till the 3rd of July. On the following day the bishops assembled in the hall of the palace, which had been prepared for the purpose. We learn from Eusebius, that the assembly sat in profound silence, while the great officers of State and other dignified persons entered the hall, and awaited in trembling expectation the appearance of the Emperor. Constantine at length entered; he was splendidly attired: the eyes of the bishops were dazzled by the gold and precious stones upon his raiment. The whole assembly rose to do him honour. He advanced to a golden seat prepared for him, and there stood, in respectful deference to the spiritual dignitaries, till he was requested to sit down. After a hymn of praise was sung, he delivered an exhortation on the importance of peace and union. The council sat for rather more than two months, and Constantine seems to have been

present during the greater part of the sittings, listening with patience, and conversing freely with the different prelates.

THE NICENE CREED

The celebrated confession of faith usually called “**The Nicene Creed,**” was the result of the long and solemn deliberations of the assembly. They decided against the Arian opinions, and firmly maintained the doctrines of the holy Trinity, of the true Godhead of Christ, and of His oneness with the Father in power and glory. Arius himself was brought before the council, and questioned as to his faith and doctrine; he did not hesitate to repeat, as his belief, the false doctrines which had destroyed the peace of the church. The bishops, when he was advancing his blasphemies, with one accord stopped their ears, and cried out that such impious opinions were worthy of anathema together with their author. St. Athanasius, although at the time but a deacon, drew the attention of the whole council by his zeal in defence of the true faith, and by his penetration in unravelling and laying open the artifices of the heretics. But more of the noble Athanasius by-and-by.

This famous creed was subscribed by all the bishops present, with the exception of a few Arians. The decision of the council having been laid before Constantine, he at once recognised in the unanimous consent of the council the work of God, and received it with reverence, declaring that all those persons should be banished who refused to submit to it. The Arians, hearing this, through fear subscribed the faith laid down by the council. They thus laid themselves open to the charge of being dishonest men. Two bishops only Secundus and Theonas, both Egyptians, continued to adhere to Arius; and they were banished with him to Illyria. Eusebius of Nicomedia, and Theognis of Nice, were condemned about three months later, and sentenced by the Emperor to banishment. Severe penalties were now denounced against the followers of Arius: all his books were sentenced to be burnt; and it was even made a capital offence to conceal any of his writings. Their labours being completed, the bishops dispersed to their respective provinces. Besides the solemn declaration of their opinion of the doctrine in question, they finally set at rest the question respecting the celebration of Easter;⁵⁶ and settled some other matters which were brought before them.

⁵⁶ The Eastern churches from an early period observed the festival of Easter in commemoration of the *crucifixion* of Christ, which answered to the Jewish Passover, on the fourteenth day of the month. This may have arisen from the fact that in the East there were many Jewish converts. The Western churches observed the festival in commemoration of the *resurrection*. This difference as to the day gave rise to a long and fierce controversy. But after much contention between the Eastern and Western churches, it was ordained by the council of Nice to be observed in commemoration of the resurrection throughout the whole of Christendom. Thus, Easterday is the Sunday following the fourteenth day of the paschal moon which happens upon or next after the 21st of March: so that, if the said fourteenth day be a Sunday, it is not that Sunday but the next. It may be any Sunday of the five weeks which commence with March 22nd and end with April 25th.

CONSTANTINE CHANGES HIS MIND

As the Emperor had no independent judgment of his own in ecclesiastical matters, and certainly no spiritual discernment into these doctrinal controversies, the continuance of his favour could not be relied upon. In little more than two years his mind was completely changed. But these two years were eventful in the domestic history of Constantine, in what was much more serious than a change of mind as to Arianism. The same year that he convened the council of Nice, he gave private orders for the execution of Crispus, his eldest son, and for the suffocation of his wife, Fausta, in a hot bath, who had been married to him for about twenty years. History can find no better reasons for these deeds of darkness than a mean and an unworthy jealousy. The wisdom and bravery of Crispus, in the final overthrow of Licinius, is said to have excited his father's jealousy, and this was probably fomented by Fausta, who was his stepmother. Knowing that he was bitterly reproached for his cruelty to his own son, he ordered the death of Fausta in his remorse and misery. As we have expressed a very decided judgment against the unhallowed nature of the church's connection with the State, we have said this much of the private life of the Emperor, so that the reader may judge as to the fitness, or rather, the unfitness, of one so polluted with blood, to sit as president in a christian council. From that day to this the state church has been exposed to the same defilement, in the person either of the sovereign or the royal commissioner.

Constantia, the widow of Licinius, and sister of Constantine, possessed great influence with her brother. She sympathised with the Arians, and was under their influence. On her deathbed in 327, she succeeded in convincing her brother that injustice had been done to Arius, and prevailed on him to invite Arius to his court. He did so, and Arius appeared, presenting to the Emperor a confession of his faith. He expressed in a general way his belief in the doctrine of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and besought the Emperor to put a stop to idle speculations, so that schism might be healed, and all, united in one, might pray for the peaceable reign of the Emperor, and for his whole family. By his plausible confession, and his fair speeches, he gained his point. Constantine expressed himself satisfied, and Arius and his followers, in turn, stood high in the imperial favour. The banished ones were recalled. A breath of court air changed the outward aspect of the whole church. The Arian party had now full possession of the Emperor's weighty influence, and they hastened to use it.

ATHANASIUS, BISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA

In the council of Nice **Athanasius** had borne a distinguished part; his zeal and abilities designated him at once as the head of the orthodox party, and as the most powerful antagonist of the Arians. On the death of Alexander, in the year 326, he was elevated to the see of Alexandria by the universal voice of his brethren. He was then only thirty years of age, and knowing something of

the dangers as well as the honours of the office, he would have preferred a less responsible position; but he yielded to the earnest desires of an affectionate congregation. He held the see for nearly half a century. His long life was devoted to the service of the Lord and His truth. He continued steadfast in the faith and inflexible in his purpose, according to the noble stand which he made in the council of Nice, down to his latest hour. The divinity of Christ was to him no mere speculative opinion, but the source and strength of his whole christian life. And nowhere else is it to be found by any one; as the apostle assures us. “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” (1 John 5:11, 12) This life dwells in the only-begotten Son of the Father. He is “the eternal life.” And this life, to the praise of the glory of God’s grace, is given to all who believe in the true Christ of God. In receiving Christ, we receive eternal life, and become the sons of God — heirs of God — and joint heirs with Christ. This life is not the property of any mere creature, however exalted. The holy angels have a most blessed and an unceasing existence by the power of God; but the Christian has eternal life through faith in Christ, by the grace of God. Nothing could be more fatal to the well-being of the human soul than the doctrine of Arius. But to return to our history.

While the advancement of Athanasius to the see of Alexandria gave great joy and hope to his friends, it filled his enemies with the bitterest resentment. They now saw the great leader of the Catholics⁵⁷ the bishop of that church from which Arius had been expelled; and that he was supported by the affections of his people and by a hundred bishops who owned allegiance to the great see of Alexandria. They knew his power and indefatigable zeal in defence of the decrees of the Nicene Council, and might well judge, that if his influence had been so great when in a private capacity, what might now be expected when he was placed in so eminent a station? Wherefore, they laid their plans and united their powers to overthrow him.

ATHANASIUS CONTESTS THE AUTHORITY OF CONSTANTINE

Eusebius, of Nicomedia, first resorted to apparently friendly measures with Athanasius, for the purpose of inducing him to re-admit Arius to the fellowship of the church; but, failing completely in this, he influenced the Emperor to command him. An imperial mandate was issued to receive Arius and all his friends who were willing to connect themselves once more with the catholic church; and informing him that, unless he did so, he should be deposed from his station, and sent into exile. Athanasius, however, was not to be intimidated by imperial edicts, but firmly replied, that he could not acknowledge persons who had been condemned by a decree of the whole church. “Constantine now found to his astonishment,” says Milman, “that an

⁵⁷ The term *Catholic Church*, as given by Constantine, simply means the *established church*.

imperial edict — which would have been obeyed in trembling submission from one end of the Roman empire to the other, even if he had enacted a complete political revolution, or endangered the property and privileges of thousands — was received with deliberate and steady disregard by a single christian bishop. During two reigns, Athanasius contested the authority of the Emperor.”⁵⁸ He endured persecution, calumny, exile; his life was frequently endangered in defence of the one great and fundamental truth — the Godhead of the blessed Lord, he confronted martyrdom, not for the broad distinction between Christianity and heathenism, but for that one central doctrine of the christian faith.

A succession of complaints against Athanasius was carried to the Emperor by the Arian, or more properly the Eusebian, party. But it would be outside our purpose to go into details: still we must trace the *silver line* a little farther in this noble and faithful witness.

The most weighty charge was, that Athanasius had sent a sum of money to a person in Egypt, to aid him in the prosecution of a design of conspiracy against the Emperor. He was ordered to appear and answer the charge. The prelate obeyed and stood before him. But the personal appearance of Athanasius, a man of remarkable power over the minds of others, seems for the moment to have overawed the soul of Constantine. The frivolous and groundless accusations were triumphantly refuted by Athanasius, before a tribunal of his enemies, and the unblemished virtue of his character undeniably established. And such was the effect of the presence of Athanasius on the Emperor, that he styled him a man of God and considered his enemies to be the authors of the disturbances and divisions, but this impression was of short duration, as he continued to be governed by the Eusebian party.

THE COUNCIL OF TYRE

In 334 Athanasius was summoned to appear before a council at Caesarea. He refused on the ground that the tribunal was composed of his enemies. In the following year he was cited before another council to be held at **Tyre** by imperial authority; which he attended. Upwards of a hundred bishops were present; a lay commission of the Emperor directed their proceedings. A multitude of charges were brought against the undaunted prelate; but the darkest, and the only one we will notice, was the twofold crime of *magic* and *murder*. It was said that he had killed Arsenius, a Miletian bishop — had cut off one of his hands, and had used it for magical purposes; the hand was produced. But Athanasius was prepared for the charge. The God of truth was with him. He calmly asked whether those present were acquainted with Arsenius? He had been well known to many. A man was suddenly brought into the court, with his whole person folded in his mantle. Athanasius first uncovered the head. He was at once recognised as the murdered Arsenius. His

⁵⁸ *History of Christianity*, vol. 2. p. 540.

hands were next uncovered; and on examination he was proved to be Arsenius, alive, un mutilated. The Arian party had done their utmost to conceal Arsenius, but the Lord was with His guiltless servant, and the friends of Athanasius succeeded in discovering him. The malice of the unprincipled Arians was again exposed, and the innocence of Athanasius triumphantly vindicated.

But the implacable enemies of the bishop were yet fruitful in their accusations against him. Once more he was commanded to appear in Constantinople, and to answer for himself in the imperial presence.

The old charges on this occasion were dropped, but a new one was skilfully chosen, with the view of arousing the jealousy of the Emperor. They asserted that Athanasius had threatened to stop the sailing of the vessels laden with corn from the port of Alexandria to Constantinople. By this means a famine would be produced in the new capital. This touched the pride of the Emperor; and whether from belief of the charge, or from a wish to remove so influential a person he banished him to Treves in Gaul. The injustice of the sentence is unquestionable.

THE DEATH OF ARIUS

Neither Constantine nor Arius long survived the exile of Athanasius. Arius subscribed an orthodox creed; Constantine accepted his confession. He sent for Alexander, bishop of Constantinople, and told him that Arius must be received into communion on the following day, which was Sunday. Alexander, who had almost completed a hundred years, was greatly distressed by the Emperor's orders. He entered the church, and prayed earnestly that the Lord would prevent such a profanation. On the evening of the same day Arius was talking lightly, and in a triumphant tone, of the ceremonies appointed for the morrow. But the Lord had ordered otherwise; He had heard the prayer of His aged servant; and that night the great heresiarch died. His end is related with circumstances which recall to mind that of the traitor Judas. What effect the event had on Constantine we are not informed; but he died soon after in his sixty-fourth year.⁵⁹

REFLECTIONS ON THE GREAT EVENTS IN CONSTANTINE'S REIGN

Before proceeding farther with our general history, we shall do well to pause for a moment, and consider the bearings of the great changes which have taken place, both in the position of the church and the world, during the reign of Constantine the Great. It would not be too much to say, that the church has passed through the most important crisis of her history; and that the downfall of idolatry may be considered as the most important event in the whole

⁵⁹ See Robertson's *Church History*, vol. 1, p. 199; Cave's *Lives of the Fathers*, vol. 2, p. 145.

history of the world. From a period shortly after the flood, idolatry had prevailed among the nations of the earth, and Satan, by his craft, had been the object of worship. But the whole system of idolatry was doomed throughout the Roman earth, if not finally overthrown, by Constantine; it had, at any rate, received its deadly wound.

The church, doubtless, lost much by her **union with the State**. She no longer existed as a separate community, and was no longer governed exclusively by the will of Christ. She had surrendered her independence, lost her heavenly character, and become inseparably identified with the passions and interests of the ruling power. All this was sad in the extreme, and the fruit of her own unbelief. But, on the other hand, the world gained immensely by the change. This must not be overlooked in our lamentations over the failure of the church. The standard of the cross was now raised all over the empire; Christ was publicly proclaimed as the only Saviour of mankind; and the holy scriptures acknowledged to be the word of God, the only safe and certain guide to eternal blessedness. The professing church was no doubt in a low unspiritual state, before she was connected with the civil power, so that she may have thought more of her own ease than of her mission of blessing to others; nevertheless, God could work by means of these new opportunities, and hasten the disappearance from the face of the Roman world of the fearful abominations of idolatry.

The general legislation of Constantine bears evidence of the silent under-working of Christian principles; and the effect of these humane laws would be felt far beyond the immediate circle of the christian community. He enacted laws for the better observance of Sunday; against the sale of infants for slaves, which was common among the heathen; and also against child-stealing for the purpose of selling them, with many other laws, both of a social and moral character, which are given in the histories already noted. But the one grand all-influential event of his reign was the casting down of the idols, and the lifting up of Christ. The Ethiopians and Iberians are said to have been converted to Christianity during his reign.

THE SONS OF CONSTANTINE

A.D. 337-361

Constantine the Great was succeeded by his three sons, Constantine, Constantius, and Constans. They had been educated in the faith of the gospel, and had been named Caesars by their father, and on his death they divided the empire among them. **Constantine** obtained Gaul, Spain, and Britain, **Constantius**, the Asiatic provinces, with the capital, Constantinople, and **Constans** held Italy and Africa. The beginning of the new reign was characterised — as was usual in those times — by killing the relatives who might one day prove rivals to the throne; but along with the old and usual

political jealousies and hostilities, a new element now appears — that of religious controversy.

The eldest son, Constantine, was favourable to the catholics, and signalled the commencement of his reign by recalling Athanasius, and replacing him in his see at Alexandria. But in 340 Constantine was killed in an invasion of Italy; and Constans took possession of his brother's dominions, and thus became the sovereign of two-thirds of the empire. He was favourable to the decisions of the Nicene Council, and adhered with firmness to the cause of Athanasius. Constantius, his Empress, and court, were partial to Arianism. And thus the religious war began between the two brothers — between the East and the West and was carried on without either justice or humanity, to say nothing of the peaceful spirit of Christianity. Constantius, like his father, interfered much in the affairs of the church; he pretended to be a theologian, and throughout his reign the empire was incessantly agitated by religious controversy. The councils became so frequent, that the public posting establishments were constantly employed by the continual travelling of the bishops; on both sides councils were assembled to oppose councils. But as the principal events of the period, as well as the *silver line* of God's grace, are connected with Athanasius, we will return to his history.

THE HISTORY OF ATHANASIUS

After a banishment of two years and four months Athanasius was restored to his diocese by the younger Constantine, where he was received with a joyful welcome by his flock. But the death of that prince exposed Athanasius to a second persecution. Constantius, who is described as a vain but weak man, soon became the secret accomplice of the Eusebians. In the end of 340, or beginning of 341, a council met at Antioch for the dedication of a splendid church which had been founded by Constantine the elder. The number of bishops is said to have been about ninety-seven, of whom forty were Eusebians. Amongst the number of canons which were passed, it was decided, and with some appearance of equity, that a bishop deposed by a synod should not resume his episcopal functions till he had been absolved by the judgment of another synod equal in authority. This law was evidently passed with a special reference to the case of Athanasius; and the council pronounced, or rather confirmed, his degradation. **Gregory**, a Cappadocian, a man of a violent character, was appointed to the see, and Philagrius, the prefect of Egypt, was instructed to support the new primate with the civil and military powers of the province. Athanasius being the favourite of the people, they refused to have a bishop thrust upon them by the Emperor: scenes of disorder, outrage, and profanation followed. "Violence was found necessary to support iniquity," says Milner, "and an Arian prince was obliged to tread in the steps of his pagan predecessors, to support what he called the church."

Athanasius, oppressed by the Asiatic prelates, withdrew from Alexandria, and passed three years in Rome. The Roman pontiff, Julius, with a synod of fifty

Italian bishops, pronounced him innocent, and confirmed to him the communion of the church. No fewer than five creeds had been drawn up by the Eastern bishops in assemblies convened at Antioch between 341 and 345, with the view of concealing their real opinions; but not one of them was admitted to be free from an Arian element, though the more offensive positions of Arianism were professedly condemned. The two Emperors, Constantius and Constans, now became anxious to heal the breach which existed between the Eastern and the Western churches, and accordingly they summoned a council to meet at Sardica, in Illyria, A.D. 347, to decide the disputed points. Ninety-four bishops of the West, twenty-one of the East, having assembled, and duly considered the matter on both sides, decided in favour of Athanasius: the orthodox party restoring the persecuted primate of Alexandria, and condemning all who opposed him as the enemies of the truth. In the meantime the intruder, Gregory, died, and Athanasius, on his return to Alexandria, after an exile of eight years, was received with universal rejoicing. "The entrance of the archbishop into his capital," says one, "was a triumphal procession: absence and persecution had endeared him to the Alexandrians; and his fame was diffused from Ethiopia to Britain over the whole extent of the Christian world."

After the death of **Constans**, the friend and protector of Athanasius, in 350, the cowardly Constantius felt that the time was now come to avenge his private injuries against Athanasius, who had no longer Constans to defend him. But how to accomplish his object was the difficulty. Had he decreed the death of the most eminent citizen, the cruel order would have been executed without any hesitation; but the condemnation and death of a popular bishop must be brought about with caution, delay, and some appearance of justice. The Arians set to work; they renewed their machinations; more councils were convened.

THE COUNCILS OF ARLES AND MILAN

In the year 353 a synod was held at **Arles**, and in 355 another met at **Milan**. Upwards of three hundred bishops were present at the latter. The sessions of the council were held in the palace, Constantius and his guards being present. The condemnation of Athanasius was artfully represented as the only measure which could restore the peace and union of the catholic church. But the friends of the primate were true to their leader and the cause of truth. They assured the Emperor, in the most manly and christian spirit, that neither the hope of his favour, nor the fear of his displeasure, would prevail on them to join in the condemnation of an absent, an innocent, an honoured servant of Christ. The contest was long and obstinate; the interest excited was intense, and the eyes of the whole empire became fixed on a single bishop. But the Arian Emperor was impatient, and before the council of Milan was dissolved, the archbishop of Alexandria had been solemnly condemned and deposed. A general persecution was directed against all who favoured him, and also for the purpose of enforcing conformity to the Emperor's opinion. And so sharp

did this persecution become, that the orthodox party raised the cry, that the days of Nero and of Decius had returned. Athanasius himself found a refuge in the deserts of Egypt.

THE DEATH AND SUCCESSORS OF CONSTANTIUS

In the year 361 Constantius, the patron of the Arians, died. Like his father, he delayed his baptism till a short time before his death. The prosperous days of the Arians were now ended.

Julian, commonly called the Apostate, succeeded to the throne, and probably to show his utter indifference to the theological question in dispute, he ordered the restoration of the bishops whom Constantius had banished. After a brief reign of twenty-two months, and a vain attempt to revive heathenism, he died suddenly of a wound in the breast from a Persian arrow.

Jovian, who immediately succeeded Julian to the throne professed Christianity. He is the first of the Roman Emperors who gave anything like clear evidence that he really loved the truth as it is in Jesus. He seems to have been a sincere Christian before he came to the throne, as he told the apostate Julian that he would rather quit the service than his religion; nevertheless Julian valued him, and kept him near his person until his death. The army declared itself Christian; the Labarum, which had been thrown aside during the reign of Julian, was again displayed at its head. Jovian however, had learnt from the preceding times that religion could not be advanced by outward force. Hence he allowed full toleration to his pagan subjects; and, with respect to the divisions among Christians, he declared that he would molest no one on account of religion, but would love all who studied the peace and welfare of the church of God. Athanasius, on hearing of the death of Julian, returned to Alexandria, to the agreeable surprise and joy of his people. Jovian wrote to Athanasius, confirming him in his office, and inviting him to his court. The bishop complied; the Emperor desired instruction and advice; by personal intercourse he gained an influence over Jovian which his enemies in vain attempted to disturb. But the reign of this christian prince lasted only about eight months. He was found dead in his bed, on February 17th, 364, having been suffocated, as was supposed, by charcoal.

Valentinian and **Valens**. Jovian was succeeded by two brothers — Valentinian and Valens; the former governed in the West, the latter in the East. In the affairs of the church Valentinian is said to have followed the plan of Jovian. He declined all interference in questions of doctrines, but adhered firmly to the Nicene faith. As a soldier and a statesman he was possessed of many great abilities. Both brothers are said to have exposed themselves to danger by the profession of Christianity in the reign of Julian; but Valens was afterwards won over to Arianism by his wife, who persuaded him to receive baptism from the Arian bishop of Constantinople. It is said that the bishop exacted of him an oath to persecute the catholics. Be this as it may, it is

certain that soon after his baptism he manifested great zeal in favour of the Arians, and bitterly persecuted the ecclesiastics for their adherence to the Nicene faith, and the exercise of their influence on its behalf.

Under the edict of Valens, A.D. 367, Athanasius was once more attacked by the Arians — the enemies of christian piety; Tatian, governor of Alexandria, attempted to drive him out of the city; but the feeling of the people was so strong in favour of the venerable bishop, that he dared not for some time to execute his orders. In the meantime, Athanasius, knowing what was near at hand, quietly retired, and remained for four months concealed in his father's sepulchre. This was the fourth time he had fled from Alexandria. Valens, however, from the dread he seems to have had of the people, recalled him, and permitted him, without any further hindrance, to prosecute his pastoral labours, until A.D. 373, when he was summoned from his work on earth to his rest in heaven. Valens perished in a battle with the Goths in the year 378, after having reigned fourteen years.

WHAT SERVICE DID ATHANASIUS RENDER TO THE CHURCH?

We are disposed to believe that, under the blessing of God, he was the means of preserving the church from the Arian heresy, which threatened to extinguish from Christianity both the name and the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. The enemy aimed at nothing short of a Christless system, which might ere long issue in an utter abandonment of Christianity. But the Nicene council was used of God to overthrow his wicked devices. The assertion of the Godhead of Christ and of the Holy Ghost as equal with God the Father, was greatly blessed of God then, and has been from that day even until now. Though the church had been unfaithful, and drifted into the world, “even where Satan's seat is,” the Lord in mercy raised up a great testimony to His holy name, and to the faith of His saints. Historians, both civil and ecclesiastical, bear the most honourable testimony to the ability, activity, constancy, self-denial, and unwearied zeal of Athanasius in the defence of the great doctrine of the holy Trinity. “Thou holdest fast My name, and hast not denied My faith,” are words that refer, we doubt not, to the faithfulness of Athanasius and his friends, as also to the faithful in other times.

The *overcomers* spoken of in the address were also there, without doubt; but it is not permitted of the Lord that they should be seen or recorded by the historian. They were God's hidden ones who were nourished on the hidden manna. They will have a place of great nearness to the Lord in the glory. “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.” (Rev. 2:17)

CHRISTIANITY UNDER THE REIGN OF GRATIAN

Valentinian was succeeded by his son, **Gratian**, in 375. He was then only sixteen years of age. He admitted as a nominal colleague his half-brother, the younger Valentinian; and soon after he chose Theodosius as an active colleague, on whom he bestowed the sovereignty of the East. Gratian had been educated in the Christian faith, and gave evidence of being a true believer. He was the first of the Roman Emperors who refused the title and robe of high priest of the ancient religion. How could a Christian, he said, be the high priest of idolatry? It is an abomination to the Lord. Thus we see in the early piety of this young prince the blessed effects of the testimony of the faithful. What a new and strange thing in me; a pious prince to ascend the throne of Rothe Caesars at the age of sixteen! But he was humble as well as pious.

Being conscious of his own ignorance in divine things, he wrote to Ambrose, bishop of Milan, to visit him. "Come," he said, "that you may teach the doctrines of salvation to one who truly believes, not that we may study for contention but that the revelation of God may dwell more intimately in my heart." Ambrose answered him in an ecstasy of satisfaction: "Most christian prince," he says, "modesty, not want of affection, has hitherto prevented me from waiting upon you. If, however, I was not with you personally, I have been present with my prayers, in which consists still more the duty of a pastor."

The young Emperor was generally popular; but his attachment to the orthodox clergy, the time he spent in their company, the influence they gained over him (especially Ambrose) exposed him to the contempt of the more warlike part of his subjects. The frontiers were sorely pressed at this time by the barbarians, but Gratian was unable to undertake the conduct of a war against them. Maximus, taking advantage of the disaffection of the army, raised the standard of revolt. Gratian, seeing the turn things had taken, fled, with about three hundred horse, but was overpowered and killed at Lyon in the year 383. Maximus, the usurper and assassin placed himself on the throne of the West. He was afterwards overthrown and slain by Theodosius, and the younger Valentinian placed upon the throne of his father.

THEODOSIUS, SURNAMED THE GREAT

The measure of our interest in the history of the Roman Emperors must be proportionate to their acknowledgement of the truth, and their treatment of Christians. Did we not seek to discern God's hand in their government, it would be wearisome and profitless, at this distant period, to examine what remains of them. But to see God's hand, and to hear His voice, and to trace the *silver line* of His grace, throughout those rude times, keeps us in company with Himself, and our experience is increased. But almost everything depends, as to service to God, or blessing to ourselves, in the motive or object with which we study the history of the church, and that which effects is. According

to this principle of estimation, **Theodosius** claims an earnest and careful study. He was God's minister, as well as the Roman Emperor, was used of Him to subdue Arianism in the East, and to abolish the worship of idols throughout the Roman world. Idolatry is the boldest sin of man, and can never be exceeded until "that man of sin be revealed, the 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." (2 Thess. 2:3, 4) The full expression of this blasphemy is still future, and will be the signal for immediate judgment, and the dawn of the millennial day.

But the zeal of Theodosius was not merely negative. He supported Christianity, according to his light, more vigorously than any of his predecessors. He completed what Constantine commenced, and far surpassed him in christian zeal and earnestness. Soon after his baptism he assembled a council, which met at Constantinople on May 2nd, 381. The principal objects for which this council was convoked were the following: — To give greater fulness and definiteness to the Nicene creed; to condemn heresies, such as those of the Arians, Eunomians, Eudoxians, Sabellians, Apollinarians, and others; and to take measures for the union of the church.

THE BARBARIC INVADERS

Most of our readers, even the youngest have heard of "**The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire**" — the fourth great world-empire spoken of by the prophet Daniel, and by St. John in the Apocalypse. It had been on the decline for some time, and was rapidly approaching its fall, when Theodosius was called to the throne. The frontiers were menaced on all sides by the barbarians, who dwelt immediately outside the Roman earth. "On the shores of each of the great rivers which bounded the empire," says Dean Milman, "appeared a host of menacing invaders. The Persians, the Armenians, the Iberians, were prepared to pass the Euphrates or the eastern frontier; the Danube had already afforded a passage to the Goths; behind them were the Huns, in still more formidable and multiplying swarms; the Franks and the rest of the German nations were crowding to the Rhine." This frightful array of barbaric invasion will show the reader at a glance the then position of the fourth empire; and that it is as easy for God to break in pieces the iron, as the brass, the silver, or the gold.

Within the limits of the Roman earth idolatry still existed, and its worship was undisturbed. Its thousands of temples, in all their ancient grandeur and imposing ceremony, covered the land. Scarcely could the Christian turn anywhere without seeing a temple and inhaling the incense offered to idols. Christianity had only been raised to an equal toleration. Arianism and semi-Arianism, in their many forms, greatly prevailed. In Constantinople and the East they were supreme. Other heresies abounded. Such was the state of things, both within and without the empire, on the accession of Theodosius.

But for the details of his civil history, we must refer the reader to the authors already noted. We would only add, that he was used of God in arresting for a time the progress of invasion; in demolishing the images and some of the temples of heathen worship; in abolishing idolatry; in suppressing superstition, in causing the decisions of the Nicene council to prevail everywhere; and in giving triumph and predominance to the profession of Christianity.

THE RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF THEODOSIUS

We will now glance at some of the leading events in the history of the great Theodosius. In the circumstances of these events will be found the best commentary on the life of the Emperor, the power of the priesthood, and the character of the times.

Theodosius was a Spaniard. Christianity, at an early period, had been established in the Peninsula. It was famous for its firm adherence to the Athanasian doctrines throughout the Trinitarian controversy. Hosius, a Spanish bishop was president of the Nicene council. Towards the end of the first year of his reign, Theodosius was admonished by a serious illness not to delay his baptism, as the practice then was. He sent for the bishop of Thessalonica and was at once baptised. Some say that he was the first of the Emperors baptised in the full name of the holy Trinity. His admission to the church was immediately followed by an edict which proclaimed his own faith, and prescribed the religion of his subjects. "It is our pleasure that all the nations that are governed by our clemency and moderation, should stedfastly adhere to the religion which was taught by St. Peter to the Romans... According to the discipline of the apostles, and the doctrine of the gospel, let us believe the sole deity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, under an equal majesty, and a pious Trinity... Beside the condemnation of divine justice they must expect to suffer the severe penalties which our authority, guided by heavenly wisdom, shall think proper to inflict upon them."

Such was the stern and uncompromising orthodoxy of Theodosius. Still, however mistaken, he believed it was his duty so to rule as a christian Emperor, and the bishops that he consulted were more inclined to increase than to soften its severity. On one occasion his sense of justice determined him to order some Christians to rebuild at their own expense a Jewish synagogue, which, in a tumult, had been pulled down. But the vigorous bishop of Milan interfered and prevailed on him to set aside the sentence, on the ground that it was not right for Christians to build a Jewish synagogue. Herein the bishop evidently failed in a matter of common justice. He was less righteous than his imperial master.

THE FAILINGS AND VIRTUES OF THEODOSIUS

The most prominent defect in the character of Theodosius was a proneness to violent anger; yet he could be softened down and moved to be most merciful

after great provocation if properly appealed to. We have a remarkable instance of this in his forgiving the **people of Antioch**. It happened in this way:

In the year 387 the inhabitants became impatient on account of a tax which the Emperor had imposed upon them and, as they were haughtily treated by the rulers, to whom they had respectfully applied for relief, a great tumult arose in the city. The statues of the imperial family were thrown down and treated with contempt. But, a company of soldiers immediately appearing, the sedition was suppressed. The governor of the province, according to the duty of his office dispatched a faithful narrative of the whole transaction to the Emperor. But as eight hundred miles lay between Antioch and Constantinople, weeks must elapse before an answer could be received. This gave the Antiochians leisure to reflect on the nature and consequences of their crime. They were greatly and constantly agitated with hopes and fears, as may be well supposed. They knew their crime was a serious one, but they had confessed it to Flavian their bishop, and to other influential persons, with every assurance of genuine repentance. At length, twenty-four days after the sedition, the imperial commissioners arrived, bearing the will of the Emperor, and the sentence of Antioch. The following imperial mandate will show the reader how much depended on the will or temper of a single man in those times.

Antioch, the metropolis of the East, was degraded from the rank of a city; stripped of its lands, its privileges, and its revenues, it was subjected, under the humiliating denomination of a village, to the jurisdiction of Laodicea. The baths, the circus, and the theatres were shut, and, that every source of plenty and pleasure might at the same time be intercepted, the distribution of corn was abolished. The commissioners then proceeded to inquire into the guilt of individuals. The noblest and most wealthy of the citizens of Antioch appeared before them in chains; the examination was assisted by the use of torture, and their sentence was pronounced, or suspended, according to the judgment of these extraordinary magistrates. The houses of the criminals were exposed to sale, their wives and children were suddenly reduced from affluence and luxury to the most abject distress; and a bloody execution was expected to close the horrors of the day which the eloquent Chrysostom has represented as a lively image of the final judgment of the world. But God, who has the hearts of all men in His hand, and in the remembrance of what Antioch had been in the early days of the church, moved the ministers of Theodosius to pity. They are said to have shed tears over the calamities of the people; and they listened with reverence to the pressing entreaties of the monks and hermits, who descended in swarms from the mountains. The execution of the sentence was suspended, and it was agreed that one of the commissioners should remain at Antioch, while the other returned with all possible speed to Constantinople.

The exasperated rage of Theodosius had cooled down. The deputies of the distressed people obtained a favourable audience. The hand of the Lord was in

it: He had heard their cry. Grace triumphed in Theodosius. A free and general pardon was granted to the city and citizens of Antioch; the prison doors were thrown open; and senators, who despaired of their lives, recovered the possession of their houses and estates; and the capital of the East was restored to the enjoyment of her ancient dignity and splendour. Theodosius condescended to praise and reward the bishop of Antioch and others who had generously interceded for their distressed brethren; and confessed, that if the exercise of justice is the most important duty, the indulgence of mercy is the most exquisite pleasure, of a sovereign.⁶⁰

THE SIN AND REPENTANCE OF THEODOSIUS

The history of the tumult and massacre at Thessalonica, in 390, graves yet deeper lines in the character of Theodosius. In studying this period of his life, we are reminded of David the king of Israel. In this sorrowful affair the enemy gained a great advantage over the christian Emperor; but God overruled it for the deeper blessing of his soul.

Botheric, commander in chief of the district, and several of his principal officers, were killed by the populace on the occasion of a chariot-race. A favourite charioteer had been thrown into prison for a notorious crime, and, consequently was absent on the day of the games. The populace unreasonably demanded his liberty; Botheric refused, and thus the tumult was raised and the dreadful consequences followed. The news exasperated the Emperor, and he ordered the sword to be let loose upon them. Ambrose interceded, and Theodosius promised to pardon the Thessalonians. His military advisers, however, artfully insisted on the heinous character of the crime, and procured an order to punish the offenders; which was carefully kept secret from the bishop. The soldiers attacked the people indiscriminately when assembled in the circus, and thousands were slain, to avenge the death of their officers.

The mind of Ambrose was filled with horror and anguish on hearing of this massacre. As the servant of God he rises to the place of separation from evil, even in his imperial master. He retired into the country to indulge his grief, and to avoid the presence of the Emperor. But he wrote a letter to him, in which he set before him, in the most solemn manner his fearful guilt; and assuring him that he could not be allowed to enter the church of Milan until satisfied of the genuineness of his repentance. The Emperor, by this time was deeply affected by the reproaches of his own conscience and by those of his spiritual father. He bitterly bewailed the consequences of his rash fury in substituting barbarity for justice; and proceeded to perform his devotions in the church of Milan. But Ambrose met him at the porch, and, laying hold of his robe, desired him to withdraw as a man stained with innocent blood. The Emperor assured Ambrose of his contrition; but he was told that private regrets were insufficient to expiate public offences. The Emperor referred to

⁶⁰ Milman's *History of Christianity*, vol. 3, p. 140; Robertson's *History of the Church*, vol. 1, p. 242; Milner's *Church History*, vol. 2, p. 28.

David, a man after God's own heart. "You have imitated him in his crime, imitate him in his repentance," was the reply of the undaunted bishop.

The Emperor submitted to the priest. For eight months he remained in penitential seclusion; laying aside all his imperial ornaments, until at the Christmas season he presented himself before the archbishop, and humbly entreated re-admission into the church. "I weep," said he, "that the temple of God, and consequently heaven, is shut from me, which is open to slaves and beggars." Ambrose was firm, and required some practical fruit of his repentance. He demanded that in future the execution of capital punishment should be deferred until thirty days after the sentence, in order that the ill effects of intemperate anger might be prevented. The Emperor readily agreed, and was then allowed to enter the church. The scene which followed was overwhelming. The Emperor, pulling off his imperial robes, prayed prostrate on the pavement. "My soul cleaveth to the dust," he cried; "quicken thou me according to Thy word." The people wept and prayed with him, being moved with his grief and humiliation.

Ambrose mentions in his funeral oration, that from the time of the Emperor's deep anguish he never passed a day without recalling to mind the crime into which he had been betrayed by his great failing — an infirmity of temper.

REFLECTIONS ON THE DISCIPLINE OF AMBROSE, AND THE PENANCE OF THEODOSIUS

There are few events in the annals of the church more deeply interesting than the penance of the great Theodosius, and the rigorous conditions of restoration demanded by Ambrose. Stripped of the superstition and formalities peculiar to the times, we have a case before us of the most genuine and salutary discipline. We must not suppose for a moment, that the behaviour of Theodosius was the result of weakness or pusillanimity, but of a true fear of God; a real feeling of his guilt, a tender conscience, an acknowledgement of the claims of God, to whom all worldly greatness is subject.

Ambrose was neither haughty nor hypocritical, as we find many of the pontiffs became in later times. He cherished a strong affection for the Emperor, and a sincere concern for his soul, but he acted towards him from a solemn sense of his duty. He had a great idea no doubt, of the dignity with which his office invested him; and he felt himself bound to use it in behalf of justice and humanity, and in controlling the power of earthly sovereignty: a character of power, most certainly, never granted by God to a christian minister, and which often proved in after ages to be a most dangerous power, as the priest who holds in his hands the king's conscience may inflame or moderate his sanguinary passions. In the case of Ambrose it was pure christian influence. He appeared, though somewhat out of character, as the vindicator of outraged humanity, and as exercising a judicial authority over the meanest and the mightiest of mankind. But it is always disastrous to

interfere with God's order, even when the best of objects seems to be thereby gained.

About four months after his victory over Eugenius, and the chastisement of the assassins of Valentinian, Theodosius the Great died at Milan, in the year 395, not exceeding fifty years of age; the last Emperor who maintained the dignity of the Roman name. Ambrose did not long survive his imperial friend. He died at Milan on Easter-eve, 397. He deepened and strengthened the foundations of ecclesiastical power which was to influence Christianity in all future ages. Basail, the two Gregories, and Chrysostom flourished about this time.

SHORT PAPERS ON CHURCH HISTORY

CHAPTER 12

THE INTERNAL HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

The century, which closes with the death of the great Theodosius and Ambrose, has been full of the deepest interest to the christian reader. Events, the most momentous — affecting the majesty and glory of God, and the well-being of mankind — have transpired. From 303 till 313, the church passed through her most trying ordeal under Diocletian. Ten years she was in a fiery furnace; but in place of being consumed, as her enemies vainly imagined, she seemed to increase in numbers as well as in purity and power. Satan was permitted to do his utmost against her; and he so moved and stirred up the heathen population, that in all parts of the empire they arose in arms; first, to defend their ancient polytheism, and, secondly, to root out Christianity, by persecuting the Christians, and destroying their sacred books. Thus the century commenced with the great and final struggle between paganism and Christianity, and closed with the total ruin of the former, and the complete triumph of the latter. The contest ended with the fourth century, and victory has rested with Christianity ever since.

Such has been the external history of the church, and the accomplishment, so far, of the word of the Lord in the Epistles to Smyrna and Pergamos. But there are other things which most reasonably demand a little of our attention before entering on the fifth century; and no part of the wide field which lies before us seems to have a stronger claim than the sphere and influence of the great prelates of the East and the West. It must also have occurred to our readers from the necessary allusions to baptism, that the observance of that rite had an immense place in the minds of those early Christians. They believed that the waters of baptism purified the soul completely. We have thought, then, of combining the two — of giving a brief history of baptism from the writings of the Fathers; which will, at the same time, give us an opportunity of seeing what views they held, not only on baptism, but on the fundamental truths of the gospel.

ECCLESIASTICAL VARIATIONS OF BAPTISM

In the New Testament there is perfect *uniformity*, both as to precept and example, on the subject of baptism; but in our own day, and ever since the beginning of the third century, we find in the professing church endless variations both as to theory and practice on this important subject. Those not acquainted with ecclesiastical history naturally inquire, When, and by what means, did such differences arise in the church?

As it has been our plan all through these “Short Papers” to find out the *beginnings* of great questions which have affected the peace and prosperity of the church, we will endeavour, very briefly, to point out the beginning and early history of ecclesiastical baptisms. We use the term *ecclesiastical*, as distinguished from *scriptural*. Nothing is of divine authority, either in theory or practice, that was introduced after the days of the inspired apostles. So that nothing can be **christian baptism** that *varies* from the institution of Christ and the practice of His apostles. To bring in alterations is to change the thing itself, and make it not the same, but another baptism; hence we find in history there were baptisms many.

As the early history of these variations, and not controversy, is our object, we will avoid giving any opinion on the long agitated question. For more than sixteen hundred years the controversy has been maintained with great determination, and by able men on both sides. No controversy in the history of the church has been of such continuance, or conducted with such confidence of victory by both parties. As there is no *express mention* of infant baptism in scripture, the baptists think that their position is beyond question: and the paedobaptists as firmly believe that it may be inferred from several well-known passages that infant baptism was practised in the days of the apostles. There has not been so much controversy as to the *mode* of baptism. The Greeks Latins, Franks, and Germans, appear to have baptised by immersion. “Baptism is a Greek word,” says Luther, “and in Latin it may be rendered *mersio*, immersion;... and though among the greater part of us this practice has fallen into disuse, nevertheless they that are baptised ought to be entirely immersed, and forthwith lifted out of the water, and this the etymology of the word indicates, as also in the German language.” Neander’s testimony is to the same effect: “Baptism was originally administered by immersion; and many of the comparisons of St. Paul allude to this form of its administration. The immersion is a symbol of death, of being buried with Christ; the coming forth from the water is a symbol of resurrection with Christ; and both, taken together, represent the second birth, the death of the old man, and a resurrection to a new life.”⁶¹ Cave, Tillotson, Waddington, etc., speak of the mode of baptism in a similar way. And as all these testimonies are from paedobaptists, we may dismiss this part of the subject as fairly proved in church history; nevertheless faith can only stand on the word of God. We follow not the Fathers, but Christ.

Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon, is the first of the Fathers that alludes to infant baptism. He died about the year 200, so that his writings are placed towards the close of the second century. The apostolic fathers never mention it. By this time superstition, to a great extent, had taken the place of faith, so that the reader must be prepared to hear some extravagant notions advanced by some of the great doctors; yet many of them, we doubt not, were true earnest Christians. “Christ came to save all persons by Himself,” says Irenaeus, “all, I

⁶¹ *The Inquirer*, 1839, p. 232.

mean, who by Him are regenerated — baptized — unto God: infants and little ones, children and youths, and elder persons. Therefore He went through the several ages: for infants being made an infant, sanctifying infants: to little ones He was made a little one, sanctifying those of that age: and also giving to them an example of godliness, justice, and dutifulness: to youths He was a youth,” etc. Baptism was thus taught to be a complete lustration of the soul for all ages and conditions of mankind. But the controversy soon resolved itself into the one question — infant or adult. Regeneration, born again, baptism, are used as interchangeable terms, and as meaning the same thing, in the writings of the Fathers.

The passage is somewhat obscure and extremely fanciful; but it is the first trace we have of the yet unsettled question, and probably the root of all its variations ecclesiastically viewed. The effect of such teaching on superstitious minds was immense. Anxious parents hastened to have their delicate infants baptised lest they should die under the curse of original sin, and the man of the world delayed his baptism until the near approach of death to avoid any subsequent stain, and that he might emerge from the waters of regeneration to the realms of pure and unmingled blessedness. The example and reputation of Constantine led many thus to delay their baptism, though the clergy testified against the practice.

Tertullian. The testimony of this Father would prove that infants were baptised in his day — he died about 240 — but that he was not favourable to the practice: as he says, “But they whose duty it is to administer baptism are to know that it must not be given rashly... Therefore according to every man’s condition and disposition, and also their age, the delaying of baptism is more profitable, especially in the case of little children. For what need is there that the godfathers should be brought into danger? because they either fail of their promises by death, or they may be mistaken by a child’s proving of wicked disposition.”

Origen, in discoursing on the sin of our nature, alludes to baptism as the appointed means for its removal. “Infants are baptised,” he says, “for the forgiveness of sins. Of what sins? or when have they sinned? or how can any reason of the laver in their case hold good, but according to that sense that we mentioned even now: none is free from pollution, though his life be but of the length of one day upon the earth? And it is for that reason, because by the sacrament of baptism the pollution of our birth is taken away, that infants are baptised.”

Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, about the year 253, received a letter from one Fidus, a country bishop, inquiring whether an infant, before it was eight days old, might be baptised if need required. The answer proves, not only that infant baptism was then practised, but the necessity of it in their minds because of its efficacy. Cyprian, with sixty-six bishops in council, says, “As to the case of infants, whereas you judge that they must not be baptised within

two or three days after they are born; and that the rule of circumcision is to be observed, so that none should be baptised and sanctified before the eighth day after he is born: we were all in our assembly of the contrary opinion. For as for what you thought fitting to be done, there was not one that was of your mind, but all of us, on the contrary, judged that the grace and mercy of God is to be denied to no person that is born. For whereas our Lord in His gospel says, 'the Son of man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them,' so far as lies in us, no soul, if possible, is to be lost," etc.

Gregory Nazianzen, bishop of Constantinople, was a Father of great note about the year 380. He was the means of destroying the power of Arianism in the Eastern capital, where it had been maintained in great strength for nearly forty years. He had to encounter much opposition and even persecution at first; but by degrees his eloquence, the practical and serious tone of his teaching, and the influence of his godly life, began to tell, and gained him a firm footing, though he never liked the imperial style of the capital.

Dr. Wall quotes largely from Gregory on baptism; our extracts will be brief. Like the rest of the Fathers, he is wild on this subject. "What say you to those that are as yet infants, and are not in capacity to be sensible of either the grace or the lack of it? Shall we baptise them too? Yes, by all means, if any danger make it requisite. For it is better that they be sanctified without their own sense of it, than that they should die unsealed and uninitiated. And a ground of this to us is circumcision, which was given on the eighth day and was a typical seal, and was practised on those that had no use of reason." Against the practice of delaying baptism till a death-bed he speaks strongly and earnestly, comparing the service to the washing of a corpse, rather than to christian baptism.

Basil, bishop of Caesarea, is constantly associated with the two Gregories. Gregory of Nyssa was his brother, the other his chief friend. Cappadocia gave birth to the three Fathers. Basil was faithful to the Athanasian creed during its days of depression and adversity, but did not live to behold its final triumph. He died about 379. He was a great admirer and a true example of monastic Christianity. He embraced the ascetic faith, abandoned his property and practised such severe austerities as to injure his health. He fled into the desert, his fame collected, as it were, a city around him, he built a monastery, and monasteries sprang up on every side

His views of baptism are similar to those of his friend Gregory, he urges the necessity of it from the same superstitious feeling that they all had. "If Israel had not passed through the sea," he says, "they had not got rid of Pharaoh: and unless thou pass through the waters of baptism, thou shalt not be delivered from the cruel tyranny of the devil," etc. This he would apply to all ages, and enforce it by the words of the Lord to Nicodemus, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

Ambrose, bishop of Milan, like all the Fathers we have yet met with, is thoroughly mistaken as to the meaning of John 3:5: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." "You see," he says "that Christ excepts no person, not an infant, not even one that is hindered by unavoidable accident."

John, *surnamed Chrysostom*, which means the *golden-mouthed*, he obtained this name from his smooth, flowing eloquence. He was such a favourite of the people, that they used to say, "We had rather the sun should not shine, than that John should not preach." He was evidently in favour of infant baptism, though it is not clear that he believed in original sin. "For this cause we baptise infants also," he says, "though they are not defiled with sin, that there may be superadded to them *saintship, righteousness, adoption inheritance, a brotherhood with Christ and to be made members with Him.*" It would be difficult to say more as to the alleged benefits of baptism than what we have here enumerated. But extravagant as the whole sentence may seem, it has been the text of the paedobaptists from that day to this. Most of our readers are familiar with these words, "Baptism, wherein I was made a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." These words are taken, not from scripture, but from Chrysostom.

Dr. Wall is anxious to make it appear, that this great doctor was not unsound as to original sin. He suggests that the meaning of his words may be, "they are not defiled with their *own actual sins.*" But Chrysostom does not say with *their own*, but that they are not defiled with sin. And surely every child is defiled, as saith the Psalmist, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." In vain do we look for soundness on many of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity among the Fathers; to say nothing of what they all overlooked, such as the presence of the Holy Ghost in the assembly, the heavenly calling, and the heavenly relations of the church, the difference between the house of God and the body of Christ, and the blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. (Titus 2: 11-15)

REFLECTIONS ON THE HISTORY OF BAPTISM

The practice seems to have taken its rise, and derived all its wondrous influence, from a misinterpretation of John 3:5: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." It was argued from this passage that baptism was necessary to salvation and all the blessings of grace. The efficacy of the blood of Christ, the purifying power of the word of God, and the gracious operations of the Holy Spirit, were all attributed to the due observance of external baptism. And need we wonder at the place it has held in the professing church these sixteen hundred years, or at its mighty influence on all classes and all ages? though many do not hold baptismal regeneration.

The ancient Christians, Dr. Wall affirms, without the exception of one man, teach that these words of the Saviour refer to baptism. Calvin, he believes, was the first man that ever objected to this interpretation, or that refused to accept it as teaching the necessity of baptism to salvation. Supposing these statements to be correct, they prove, that the great ecclesiastical fabric that arose out of baptism was founded on a misinterpretation. The church of Rome, Lutherans, Greeks, and Anglicans, continue to follow the Fathers in this misapplication of the truth. “Shall that,” says Hooker, referring to Calvin’s new interpretation of John 3:5, “which hath always received this and no other construction be now disguised with the toy of novelty? God will have baptism embraced, not only as a sign or token of what we receive, but also as an instrument or means whereby we receive grace.” Bishop Burnet also observes speaking of the ancient times: “The words of our Saviour to Nicodemus were expounded so as to import the absolute necessity of baptism in order to salvation. These words ‘the kingdom of God,’ being taken to mean eternal glory, that expression of our Saviour’s was understood to import this that no man could be saved unless he were baptized,” etc.⁶² Calvin taught, that the benefits of baptism were limited to the children of the elect, and thus introduced the idea of hereditary Christianity. The Presbyterians follow Calvin; and, as a consequence of his teaching, circumcision becomes both the warrant and the rule of infant baptism. But some of our readers may be anxious to know what we believe to be the true interpretation of John 3:5, seeing that so much is built upon it.

WHAT IS THE TEACHING OF JOHN 3:5?

The expression “**born of water**,” we believe, in no way means baptism. The new birth is the Saviour’s theme; without which no man can *see* or *enter* into the kingdom of God. It was not yet come visibly — “not with observation” — but it was there among them, as God’s new sphere of power and blessing. Flesh cannot even perceive this kingdom. Christ had not come to teach and improve the flesh, as Nicodemus seemed to think; but that man might be partaker of a divine nature which is imparted by the Spirit. No mere external rite admits to the kingdom. There must be a new nature or life suited to the new order of things. “And Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Then the Lord shows Nicodemus the only way of entering into the kingdom. “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” Water is here used as the symbol of the cleansing and purifying power of the *word* of God; as in Peter, “seeing that ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit.” Here, the truth is spoken of as the instrument, and the Spirit as the agent, in the new birth as he goes on to say, “Being born again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the *word of God*.” Two things are necessary — the word and the Spirit. (1 Peter 1:22, 23)

⁶² Hooker’s *Ecclesiastical Polity*, book 5. 59, 60. Burnet *on the Articles*, Art. 27.

The passage obviously means the application of the word of God in the power of the Spirit — operating in the heart, conscience, thoughts, and actions; and thereby bringing in a new life from God, in which we have His mind, and His thoughts about the kingdom. The following passages will make it still plainer. “Of his own *will* begat He us with *the word of truth*.” (James 1:18) “That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of *water by* the word.” (Eph. 5:26) “Now ye are clean through the *word* which I have spoken unto you.” (John 15:3) Here we have the moral cleansing or purifying of the soul, by the application of the word through the Spirit which judges all things, and which works in us new thoughts and affections, suitable to the presence and glory of God.

As a question of *interpretation*, then, we see no allusion to baptism in John 3:5: baptism may set forth that which is conveyed by it, but baptism itself conveys nothing. On the other hand — according to the inspired commentaries in the Epistles — baptism is the sign of death, not of giving life, as the Fathers uniformly affirm. “Know ye not,” says the apostle, “that so many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death.” (Rom. 6; Col. 2; 1 Pet. 3) Besides it is perfectly plain that Nicodemus could not possibly have known anything of proper christian baptism, as it was not instituted by our Lord till after He arose from the dead.

THE ORIGIN OF INFANT COMMUNION

When superstition in general takes the place of faith, and human notions the place of God’s word, where will even serious and enlightened men not be carried! Augustine strongly advocated the practice of **infant communion**. But it followed infant baptism as a necessary consequence. The Fathers affirmed that the grace of God bestowed upon the subjects of baptism was given without measure, and without any limitation as to age, therefore, they reasoned, that the Lord’s supper might consistently be administered to all who had been baptised, whether infants or adults. The custom prevailed for many ages; it is still observed by the Greek church; but we refrain from details. In general, the inward spiritual meaning and true design of the Lord’s supper were greatly lost sight of; and the most superstitious reverence was expressed for the external symbols of the ordinance.

THE POSITION AND CHARACTER OF THE CLERGY

In studying the internal history of the church during the fourth century, innumerable things crowd for a brief notice: but we can only refer to those which characterise the period. The altered position of the clergy is an important one, and will account for many changes that were introduced by them. From the time of Constantine the members of the **christian ministry** attained a new social position with certain secular advantages. This led great numbers to join the sacred order from the most unworthy motives. Hence the

sorrowful influence of this unhallowed mixture on the whole professing church. We constantly meet with it in the pride, arrogance luxury, and assumed dignity of the whole clerical order. Thus, it is said that Martin of Tours, when at the court of Maximus, allowed the *Empress* to wait on him at table, and that when the *Emperor* had desired him to drink before him, and expected to receive the cup back after the bishop had drunk, Martin passed it to his own chaplain, as being higher in honour than any earthly potentate. This circumstance shows us where the clergy now were, what they thought of themselves and of spiritual dignity in opposition to secular rank. The church had now become like “a great house,” wherein “are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour and some to dishonour.” And such it has been ever since, and such it will be to the end; but the path of the faithful is plain. “If a man therefore purge himself from these, [the vessels to dishonour,] he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work.” (2 Tim. 2:20, 21)

THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF MONASTICISM

Before we approach the period of “the Church of Thyatira,” it may be well to notice the rise and growth of the early ascetic tendencies. The influence of **monasticism** was indeed great during the dark ages, and throughout the Western churches. Let us trace it to its source. It is well to know the beginning of things, especially of important and influential things.

During the violence of the Decian persecution, about the year 251, many Christians fled into voluntary exile. Among these was a young man named **Paul** of Alexandria, who took up his abode in the desert of Thebais, or Upper Egypt. By degrees he became attached to the mode of life he had adopted from necessity; and is celebrated as the first christian hermit, though without fame or influence at the time. Not so with his immediate and great successor.

Antony, who is regarded as the father of monasticism, was born at Coma, in Upper Egypt, about the year 251. In boyhood and youth, it is said, he was thoughtful, serious, and of a retiring disposition. He cared little for worldly learning but desired earnestly the knowledge of divine things. Before reaching the age of nineteen, he lost his parents, and came into possession of considerable property. One day while in church, it so happened that the gospel concerning the rich young man was read before the assembly. Antony considered the words of the Saviour as addressed from heaven to himself. “Sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow Me.” (Luke 18:22) He forthwith made over his land to the inhabitants of his village, turned the rest of his estates into money, and gave all to the poor, except a small portion which he reserved for the maintenance of his only sister. On another occasion he was deeply impressed with the words of the Lord, “Take therefore no thought for the morrow” (Matt. 6: 25-34), and taking these words in a literal sense, he parted

with the remainder of his property, placed his sister with a society of pious virgins, that he might be free from all cares about earthly things and embraced a life of rigid asceticism.

Antony is said to have visited Paul the hermit, and all the most famous ascetics he could hear of, endeavouring to learn from each his distinguishing virtue, and to combine all their graces in his own practice. He shut himself up in a tomb, where he lived ten years. By excessive fastings, exhaustion, and an overexcited imagination, he fancied himself beset by evil spirits, with whom he had many and severe conflicts. Antony became famous. Many visited the unnatural place of his abode in the hope of seeing him, or of hearing the noise of his conflicts with the powers of darkness. But he left his tomb, and dwelt in a ruined castle near the Red Sea for other twenty years. He increased his mortifications with the view of overcoming the evil spirits, but the same temptations and conflicts followed him.

Strange as it may seem, this remarkable and deluded man had a true heart for Christ, and a tender heart for his people. The persecution under Maximus (311) drew him from his cell to the public scenes in Alexandria. His appearance produced a great effect. He attended on the sufferers, exhorting them to unwavering confidence in their confession of Christ, and manifested great love to the confessors in the prisons and in the mines. He exposed himself in every way to danger, yet no one ventured to touch him. A kind of inviolable sanctity was supposed to surround these unearthly, ghostly-looking men. When the fury of the persecution was past, he escaped to a new place of solitude in the side of a lofty mountain. Here he cultivated a small piece of ground; multitudes flocked to him; great numbers imitated him. Mourners came to him to be comforted, the perplexed to be advised, and enemies to be reconciled. Miracles were ascribed to him, his influence was boundless.

In the year 352, when he was a hundred years old, he appeared a second time in Alexandria. This was to counteract the spread of Arianism, and defend with all his influence the true orthodox faith. His appearance produced a great sensation, multitudes thronged to see the monk — the man of God, as he was called — and hear him preach, and many pagans were converted to Christianity by his means. Antony and his monks were steady and powerful supporters of the Nicene creed. He lived to the age of a hundred and five, and died only a few days before Athanasius found a refuge among the monks of the desert in 356.

THE VIRTUES AND FAILURES OF ANTONY

Antony was evidently sincere and honest, though utterly mistaken and misled by the craft and power of Satan. In place of acting upon the Saviour's commission to His disciples, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature," or following His example who went about doing good, he thought to attain to a more elevated spirituality by withdrawing from

mankind, and devoting himself to austerity of life, and to uninterrupted communion with heaven. He was a Christian, but utterly ignorant of the nature and object of Christianity. Holiness in the flesh was his one grand object; though the apostle had said, “In me — that is, in my flesh — dwelleth no good thing.” Therefore all was failure, utter failure; as it ever must be, if we think there is any good thing in human nature, or try to become better in ourselves. In place of sanctifying his nature by fastings and idleness, he found that every evil passion was excited to greater activity.

“Hence, in his solitude,” says Neander, “he had to endure many conflicts with sense, which in some active vocation demanding the exertion of all his powers, might perhaps have been avoided. The temptations he had to battle with were so much the more numerous and powerful, as he was given to idle self-occupation, as he busied himself in fighting down the impure images that were constantly coming in from the abyss of corruption within his heart, instead of forgetting himself in worthier employments, or in looking away to the everlasting source of purity and holiness. At a later period, Antony, with a conviction grounded on long years of experience, acknowledged this, and said to his monks, ‘Let us not busy our imaginations in painting spectres of evil spirits; let us not trouble our minds as if we were lost. Let us rather be comforted and cheerful at all times, as those who have been redeemed; and let us be mindful that the Lord is with us who has conquered them and made them nothing. Let us ever remember that, if the Lord is with us, the enemy can do us no harm. The spirits of evil appear different to us, according to the different moods of mind in which they find us... But if they find us joyful in the Lord, occupied in the contemplation of future blessedness and of the things of the Lord, reflecting that everything is in the Lord’s hand, and that no evil spirit can do any harm to the Christian, they turn away in confusion from the soul which they see preserved by such good thoughts.’”⁶³

It is perfectly plain from these counsels to his monks, that Antony was not only a sincere Christian, but that he had a good knowledge of the Lord and of redemption, though so completely turned aside by a deceived heart. We are never safe unless moving on the direct lines of the truth of God. The system which this man introduced in his false dreams of perfection in the flesh, became, in process of time, the very hot-bed of profligacy and vice. And thus it continued for more than a thousand years. It was not until the sixteenth century, that the divine light of the blessed Reformation, bursting upon a scene of dense moral darkness, revealed the deep-seated corruption and the flagrant enormities of the different monastic orders. The monks at that time, like swarms of locusts, covered all Europe; they proclaimed everywhere, as history informs us, the obedience due to holy mother church, the reverence due to the saints, and more especially to the Virgin Mary, the efficacy of relics, the torments of purgatory, and the blessed advantages arising from

⁶³ *General Church History*, vol. 3, p. 310. See also *History of the Church* by James Craigie Robertson, vol. 1, p. 295.

Indulgences. But as the monks lost their popularity and influence at the Reformation, a new order was necessary to fill their place and do their evil work: and such was found in the Society of Jesus founded by Ignatius Loyola — the **Jesuits**. But we must take another glance at the early history of monasticism.

THE FIRST SOCIETY OF ASCETICS

The earliest form in which the ascetic spirit developed itself in the christian church was not in the formation of societies or communities, as we find in later times, but in the seclusion of single individuals. They believed, however mistaken, that they had a special call to strive after a higher christian life; and in order to attain this eminent holiness, they imposed upon themselves the most severe restraints. They retired to desert places, that they might give themselves up to close meditation on divine things, and that their minds might be entirely abstracted from all natural objects, and from whatever delights the senses. Both men and women supposed that they must emaciate their bodies with watchings, fasting, toil, and self-torture. As the poor body was considered an oppressive load and hindrance to their spiritual aspirations, they vied with each other in the extent to which they could carry their self-mortifications. They existed on the coarsest and most unwholesome diet: they sometimes abstained from food and sleep till nature was almost wholly exhausted. The contagion of this new device of Satan spread far and wide. The mysterious recluse was regarded as necessarily invested with peculiar sanctity. The hermit's cell was visited by the noble, the learned, the devout — all desirous to pay homage to the holy man of God; and thus spiritual pride was engendered by the flattery of the world. From this time the monastic life was held in such esteem, that many adopted it as a highly honourable employment; and afterwards formed themselves into communities, or monastic institutions.

Pachomius, who was, like Antony, a native of Thebais was converted to Christianity in the early part of the fourth century. After practising austerities for some time, he was told by an angel in his dreams, that he had made sufficient progress in the monastic life, and must now become a teacher of others. Pachomius then founded a society on an island of the Nile. Thus began ascetics to live in an association. The institution soon extended, so that before the founder's death it embraced eight monasteries, with three thousand monks; and in the beginning of the following century the number of monks was no less than fifty thousand. They lived in cells each of which contained three. They were under engagements of absolute obedience to the commands of the *Abbot*, or *father*. They wore a peculiar dress, the chief article of which was a goat-skin, in imitation of Elijah, who, with John the Baptist, was regarded as exemplifying the monastic condition. They were never to undress; they slept with their clothes on, and in chairs so constructed as to keep them almost in a standing posture. They prayed many times a day fasted on the fourth and sixth days of the week, and communicated on the Sabbath and on the Lord's day. Their meals were eaten in silence, and with their hoods drawn over their

faces, so that no one could see his neighbour. They employed themselves in agriculture and various forms of industry, and had all things in common, in imitation of the first Christians after the day of Pentecost.⁶⁴ Pachomius founded similar societies for women.

THE MONASTERIES AND THE ROMAN PONTIFF

Until nearly the close of the fifth century, the **monasteries** were placed under the superintendence of the bishops, the monks were regarded as simply laymen, and had no claim to be ranked among the sacerdotal order. Circumstances, however, in course of time, led the monks to assume a clerical character. Many of them were occupied in the work of reading and expounding the scriptures, and all of them were supposed to be engaged in the cultivation of the higher spiritual life; so that they were in great favour with the multitude, especially as they began to exercise their clerical functions beyond the confines of their establishments. Jealousies soon sprung up between the bishops and the abbots: the result was, that the abbots, to deliver themselves from dependence upon their spiritual rivals, made application to be taken under the protection of the Pope at Rome. The proposal was gladly accepted, and very quickly all the monasteries, great and small, abbeys, priories, and nunneries, were subjected to the authority of the See of Rome. This was an immense step towards the pontifical power of Rome.

The Pope could now establish in almost every quarter a kind of spiritual police, who acted as spies on the bishops as well as on the secular authorities. This event is carefully to be noted, if we would watch the ways and means of the rising power, and ultimate supremacy, of the Roman Pontiff.

The monastic system soon spread far beyond the borders of Egypt: and all the great teachers of the age, both in the East and in the West, advocated the cause of celibacy and monasticism. **St. Jerome**, in particular, the most learned man of his day is regarded as the connecting link between the two great divisions of the church — the Greek and the Roman, or the Eastern and the Western. He was the means of powerfully forwarding the cause of celibacy and monasticism, especially among females. Many Roman ladies of rank became nuns through his influence. **Ambrose** so extolled virginity in his sermons, that the mothers of Milan restrained their daughters from attending his ministry, but crowds of virgins from other quarters flocked to him for consecration. **Basil** introduced monastic life into Pontus and Cappadocia; **Martin**, into Gaul, **Augustine**, into Africa; and **Chrysostom** was prevented by the wisdom of his mother from retiring in his youth to a remote hermitage in Syria.

Before leaving this subject it may be well, once for all, to notice the rise and establishment of nunneries.

⁶⁴ Robertson, vol. 1, p. 296; Neander, vol. 3, p. 317; Gardner's *Faiths of the World*, vol. 2, p. 473.

THE ORIGIN OF FEMALE RECLUSES

From an early period of the history of the church we read of devout virgins, who professed religious chastity, and dedicated themselves to the service of Christ. Their duties and devotions were self-imposed, so that they might preserve their domestic relations or enter without scandal into the state of marriage. But the origin of communities of female recluses is attributed to Pachomius, the great founder of the regular monastic systems. Before his death, which took place about the middle of the fourth century, no fewer than twenty-seven thousand females in Egypt alone had adopted the monastic life. The rules which he formed for the convents of nuns were similar to those which bound the monks. “They lived from common funds, used a common dormitory, a table, and wardrobe. The same religious services were prescribed, habitual temperance and occasional fasting were enjoyed with the same severity. Manual labour was no less rigidly enforced; but instead of the agricultural toil imposed upon their ‘brethren,’ to them were committed the easier tasks of the needle or the distaff. By duties so numerous, by occupations admitting so great variety, they beguiled the tediousness of the day, and the dulness of monastic seclusion.”⁶⁵

It is certain that many such establishments were founded during the fourth century, and that they were propagated throughout Egypt, Syria, Pontus, and Greece, and that gradually they penetrated into every province where the name of Christ was known, and even until now they abound in all Roman Catholic countries, and form a strange and incongruous appendage to the church.

THE CEREMONY OF TAKING THE VOW

The cruel and merciless spirit of popery is painfully felt even by her own members, at the consecration of a nun. It is unnatural, unscriptural, an outrage on every feeling of our humanity, ruinous both to soul and body, and could only be submitted to through the blinding power of Satan. What a mercy to be far away from her unaccountable influence and fatal delusions! The following description of the ceremonial of a novice taking the vows, is from the pen of an eye-witness of the scene as it took place in Rome; slightly abridged.

“By particular favour we had been furnished with billets for the best seats, and, after waiting about half-an-hour, two footmen in rich liveries made way for the young countess who entered the crowded church in full dress, her dark hair blazing with diamonds. Supported by her mother she advanced to the altar. The officiating priest was Vicario, the discourse from the pulpit was pronounced by a Dominican monk, who addressed her as the affianced spouse of Christ — a saint on earth, one who had renounced the vanities of the world for a foretaste of the joys of heaven.

⁶⁵ Waddington, vol. 2, p. 252.

“The sermon ended, the lovely victim herself, kneeling before the altar at the feet of the cardinal, solemnly abjured the world whose pleasures and affections she seemed so well calculated to enjoy, and pronounced those vows which severed her from them for ever. As her voice softly chanted those fatal words, I believe there was scarcely an eye in the whole of that vast church unmoistened with tears. The diamonds that sparkled in her hair were taken off, and her long and beautiful tresses fell luxuriantly down her shoulders.

“The grate that was to entomb her was opened. The abbess and her black train of nuns appeared. Their choral voices chanted a strain of welcome. It said, or seemed to say, ‘sister spirit, come away!’ She renounced her name and title adopted a new appellation, received the solemn benediction of the cardinal, and the last embraces of her weeping friends and passed into that bourne from whence she was never to return. A panel behind the other now opened, and she appeared at the grate again. Here she was despoiled of her ornaments and her splendid attire, her beautiful hair was mercilessly severed from her head by the fatal shears of the sisters, enough to make the whole congregation shudder. As she was shorn of her natural covering, the sisters hastened to invest her with the sober robes of the nun, the white coif and the noviciate veil.

“Throughout the whole ceremony she showed great calmness and firmness, and it was not till all was over that her eyes were moistened with tears of natural emotion. She afterwards appeared at the little postern gate of the convent to receive the sympathy and praise and congratulations of all her friends and acquaintances, nay, even of strangers, all of whom are expected to pay their compliments to the new spouse of heaven.”⁶⁶

The description now given refers to the profession of a nun on the taking of the *white veil*, a step which forms the commencement of the noviciate or year of trial, and is not irrevocable. The ceremony of taking the *black veil* at the end of the year is still more solemn and dreadful, but when it has been gone through, she is a recluse for life, and can only be released from her vow by death. In the eye of Roman law, both civil and ecclesiastical, the step she has taken is beyond recall. Imprisonment, torture, death temporal and eternal are held out as the punishments of disobedience. And who can tell, outside the convent walls, what refined and prolonged cruelties may be practised inside? The power is despotic; there is no appeal; until the deceiver and the deceived, the persecutor and the helpless victim, stand side by side before the righteous tribunal of God.

REFLECTIONS ON THE PRINCIPLES OF ASCETICISM

It is truly sorrowful to reflect on the many and serious mistakes, or rather positive errors, of the great doctors, or early fathers as they are usually

⁶⁶ Gardner's *Faiths of the World*.

called. We know of nothing more grave and solemn than the fact, that they greatly misled the people then, and that by their writings they have been misleading the professing church ever since. Who can estimate the evil consequences of such teaching for the last fourteen hundred years at least? The misinterpretation or the misapplication of the word of God is evidently the rule with these leaders, to teach sound doctrine, the exception. And still they are the boast and the alleged authority of a large portion of Christendom even until now.

On the subject of **asceticism**, any one having an ordinary acquaintance with scripture may see their ignorance of the mind of God, and their perversion of His word. We are exhorted, for example, to “mortify the *deeds* of the body,” but never to mortify the body itself. The body is the Lord’s, and to be cared for. “Know ye not,” says the apostle, “that your bodies are the members of Christ?” True, they are to be kept *under* and brought into *subjection*, but that is the wisest way of caring for the body. (Rom. 8:13, 1 Cor. 6:15, 9:27) Again, the apostle says, “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth,” and then he states what these are: “fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” These are the *deeds* of the body which we are to mortify — to put to death practically; and this on the ground that the flesh was put to death on the cross. “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts,” not, observe *are* crucifying it, or *ought* to crucify it, but *have* crucified it. God has put it out of His sight by the cross, and we are to keep it out of sight by self-judgment. The *body*, on the contrary, has in the New Testament a most important place as the temple of the Holy Ghost, but the tendency of asceticism is to starve the body, and feed the flesh. “Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.” (Col. 2:23)

The Fathers seem to have overlooked that asceticism was the offspring of heathen philosophy, and not in any way of divine Christianity, but they never fairly looked into scripture for the mind of God on these subjects. The total ruin of man in the flesh not being understood by them, they vainly thought it might be improved, and were thus led astray in ways innumerable; especially as to the work of Christ, God’s judgment of the flesh, the true principle of worship, and the whole path of christian service.

Having now seen the foundation laid of the great monastic system, which was to exert so powerful an influence in connection with Christianity, literature, and civilisation, throughout the dark ages, we may leave it for the present, and return to our general history.

ARCADIUS AND HONORIUS,

A.D. 395

Theodosius the Great left two sons, **Arcadius**, aged eighteen years, and **Honorius**, who was only eleven. The elder succeeded to the sovereignty of the East, the younger to that of the West. Nothing can be more striking than the condition of the Roman world at this moment, or more fitted to excite our compassion: two Emperors of such weakness as to be incapable of conducting the administration of public affairs, and the whole empire in a state of danger and alarm from the Gothic invaders. The hand of the Lord is manifestly here. Where is now the genius, the glory, and the power of Rome? They expired with Theodosius. At a moment when the empire required the prudence, the martial skill, and the talents of a Constantine, it was professedly governed by two imbecile princes. But its days were numbered in the providence of God, it was fast passing away

The fiercest storm that had ever assailed the empire was now ready to burst upon it in its hour of weakness. The able general, Stilicho, the only hope of Rome, was assassinated soon after the death of Theodosius, and all Italy lay within the grasp of the barbarians. The Goths had yielded to the arms and especially to the policy of Theodosius, but it needed only the news of his death to arouse them to revolt and revenge. The famous **Alaric**, the crafty and able leader of the Goths, only waited for a favourable opportunity to carry out a scheme of greater magnitude and daring than had entered into the mind of any of Rome's enemies since the time of Hannibal. He was, we doubt not, the minister of God's righteous judgments on a people so deeply stained with the blood of His saints, besides having crucified the Lord of glory, and slain His apostles. Details we must leave to the civil historian of Rome's decline and fall: but we may briefly say, that Alaric was now followed, not only by the Goths, but by tribes of almost every name and race. The fury of the desert was now to be poured out on the mistress and corrupter of the world. He led his forces into Greece without opposition; he devastated its fruitful land, and plundered Athens, Corinth, Argos, and Sparta; and that which was impiously called "the eternal city," he besieged and sacked. For six days she was given up to remorseless slaughter and universal pillage. Thus fell the guilty, the devoted, city by the judgment of God: no hand held out to help: no man lamenting her fate. The richest provinces of Europe too, Italy, Gaul, and Spain, were laid waste by the immediate successors of Alaric, especially **Attila**, and new kingdoms set up by the barbarians. Thus the history of *the fourth great world-empire closes about A.D. 478, and in the twelve hundred and twenty-ninth year from the foundation of Rome.*

Theodoric, king of the Ostrogoths, a prince alike excellent in the arts of war and of government, restored an age of peace and prosperity, swept away all vestiges of the imperial government, and formed Italy into a kingdom.⁶⁷

REFLECTIONS ON THE CALAMITIES OF ROME

The christian reader may here find it profitable to pause for a moment and contemplate the overthrow of the Western empire, and the division of its territory amongst the various hordes of the barbarians. It is our privilege and for our edification in all this, to see the fulfilment and harmony of scripture, the overruling providence of God, and the accomplishment of His purposes. We can also afford to drop the tear of compassion over the miseries of our deluded fellowmen. This would be nothing more than the tender compassion of Him who wept over the devoted city Jerusalem. It is our duty to study history by the sure light of scripture; not scripture — as some have attempted — by the uncertain light of history. Thus we may be happy in the presence of God with the page of history open before us, and our faith strengthened by the mighty contrast between the kingdom of God and all earthly glory. “Wherefore,” says the apostle, “we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” (Heb. 12:28) The superiority of Christianity to the most powerful of Pagan institutions was now manifest to all. When the overwhelming judgments of God fell upon Italy, and broke in pieces the iron rule of the empire, the church suffered no harm. It was rather shielded, and the means of shielding others, than exposed to danger. Like the ark which rose above the dark waters of the deluge, the church was preserved from the fury of the invader. There was no instance of the barbarians embracing the old religion of Greece and Rome, they either adhered to the superstitions of their ancestors, or adopted some form of Christianity. There is no sure footing for the sinner amidst the convulsions of earth, the rise and fall of empires, but the Rock of Ages the risen and exalted Christ of God. “Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him.” (Ps. 2:12) The Lord provided for the safety of His people by the previous conversion of those who subverted the empire.

THE CONVERSION OF THE BARBARIANS

It is always interesting and edifying to trace the hand of the Lord in turning the wrath of man to His own praise, and in bringing the greatest good to His own people out of that which appears to be their heaviest calamity. In the reign of Gallienus, about 268, a great number of Roman provincials had been led away into captivity by the Gothic bands; many of these captives were Christians, and several belonged to the ecclesiastical order. They were dispersed by their masters as *slaves* in the villages; but as *missionaries* by the Lord. They preached the gospel to the barbarous people, and numbers were

⁶⁷ *Encyclop. Brit.* vol. 19, p. 420. White's *Eighteen Christian Centuries*, p. 94.

converted. Their increase and order may be inferred from the fact that they were represented at the Nicene council by a bishop, named Theophilus.

Ulphilas, who is commonly called “the Apostle of the Goths,” has deserved the grateful remembrance of posterity but especially of Christians. About the middle of the fourth century, he invented an alphabet and translated the scriptures into the Gothic language, with the exception of the books of Samuel and Kings, lest their warlike contents should be found too congenial to the ferocity of the barbarians. At first they appear to have been simple and orthodox in their faith, but afterwards became deeply tinged with Arianism, especially after the Arian ministers, who were ejected from their churches by Theodosius, had laboured diligently among them.

Alaric and his Goths were professed Christians; they directed their wrath against the heathen temples, but greatly revered the churches. This was the great mercy of God to His people; numbers of whom fled to the churches, where they found a sanctuary. The earnest faith and the indefatigable zeal of Ulphilas, together with his blameless life, had gained the love and confidence of the people. They received in faith the doctrines of the gospel, which he preached and practised: so that the first invaders of the empire had previously learnt in their own land to profess or at least to respect, the religion of the vanquished. And herein we see the truth, or rather the fulfilment of the Apostle’s words in his Epistle to the Romans: “The gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek;” and again, “I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians; both to the wise and the unwise.” The learned citizens of the Roman empire, and the rude inhabitants of Scythia and Germany, were alike brought under the saving power of the gospel.

THE CONVERSION OF CLOVIS

As the conversion of **Clovis** is said to have been the most important in the fifth century, we must give a few particulars of the event — important, we mean as to its consequences, both immediate and remote, on the history of Europe, and so far of the church.

The Franks, a people of Germany, had settled in the north of France, near Cambrai; a most religious part of the country, rendered famous by the shrine of Saint Martin of Tours, and by the legendary virtues of other saints. Clovis was a pagan, but Clotilda, his wife, had embraced the Catholic faith. She had long urged him to become a Christian but he was slow to believe. At length, however, when engaged in battle with the Alemanni, and finding himself in danger, he thought of Clotilda’s God, and prayed to Him; declaring that his old gods had failed him, and vowing to become a Christian if he should gain the victory. The tide of battle turned; his enemies were defeated; and true to his vow, at Christmas, 496, Clovis was baptised at Rheims by the bishop,

Remigius. Three thousand warriors followed his example, declaring their readiness to be of the same religion as their king.

Here we have another Constantine. Clovis found the profession of Christianity most favourable to his political interests, but it produced no change for the better in his life. His object was conquest, his ambition was boundless, his deeds were daring and cruel. From being only a Frankish chief with a small territory, he became the founder of the great French monarchy. And from his confession of the Catholic faith, and his alliance with the Roman Pontiff, he was acknowledged champion of Catholicism, and declared to be the only orthodox sovereign in the West: all the others were Arians. Alaric who conquered Rome, Genseric who conquered Africa, Theodoric the Great who became king of Italy, and many of the Lombard kings, were Arians. Hence the kings of France derive from Clovis the title of “eldest Son of the Church.”

To the student of prophecy it is interesting to see, that by this time at least five or six barbarian kings were in possession of the Roman provinces, and ruled over what had been the Latin empire. But this had passed away. It had died as an empire, and must remain in the place of death until resuscitated, according to the word of the Lord, in the latter day. (Rev. 13, 17)

Before concluding the Pergamos period, we find it will be necessary to notice, however briefly, three things — the internal state of the church, the Pelagian and Nestorian controversies.

rites and ceremonies

The more general adoption of Christianity, as will easily be imagined, was followed by an increase of splendour in all that concerned the worship of God, so-called. Churches were built and adorned with greater cost; the officiating clergy were attired in richer dresses, the music became more elaborate, and many new ceremonies were introduced. And these usages were then justified on the same ground that we find the high church party justifying the extraordinary rites and ceremonies of the present day.⁶⁸ It was intended to recommend the gospel to the heathen by ceremonies which might surpass those of their old religion. Multitudes were drawn into the church then, as they are now, without any sufficient understanding of their new position, and with minds still possessed of heathen notions, and corrupted by heathen morality. Even in the earliest days of Christianity we find irregularities in the church at Corinth through the unforgotten practices of the heathen. The burning of candles in daylight, incense, images, processions, lustrations, and innumerable other things, were introduced in the fourth and fifth centuries. For, as Mosheim observes, “While the good-will of the Emperors aimed to advance the christian religion, the indiscreet piety of the bishops obscured its

⁶⁸ See *The Church and the World*, 1866.

true nature and oppressed its energies, by the multiplication of rites and ceremonies.”⁶⁹

THE DEGENERATING INFLUENCE OF RITUALISM

The tendency of all ecclesiastical ritualism is to produce a spirit of superstition to the subversion of faith, of mere formality to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and of resting in our own good works to the rejection of the finished work of Christ. The word of God is thus practically set aside, the Holy Spirit grieved, and the heart laid open to the inroads of Satan. When faith is in lively exercise, the word of God strictly followed, and the promised guidance of the Comforter relied upon, the soul is strong and vigorous in the divine life, and the suggestions of the enemy unheeded. Satan is a keen observer of the different states of the believer’s soul and of the professing church. He knows when he will be successful in his attempts against the individual believer or the church; he waits his time — he watches his opportunity. When he sees the mind taking a wrong direction, he soothes, flatters, stimulates. Solemn thought for us all!

THE PELAGIAN HERESY

The condition of the church in the beginning of the fifth century gave the adversary an opportunity to bring in a new heresy, which introduced a fresh controversy that has continued with more or less violence from that day even until now. This was *Pelagianism*. The great heresy, Arianism which had hitherto agitated the church, originated in the East and related to the Godhead of Christ, one was now to arise in the West, which had for its subject the nature of man after the fall and his relations to God. The last misrepresented the lost sinner; the first, the divine Saviour.

Pelagius is said to have been a monk of the great monastery of Bangor, in Wales, and probably the first Briton who distinguished himself as a theologian. His real name was Morgan. His follower, **Celestius**, is supposed to have been a native of Ireland. Augustine speaks of him as younger than Pelagius — bolder and less crafty. These two companions in error visited Rome, where they became intimate with many persons of ascetic and saintly reputation, and disseminated their opinions with caution and in privacy; but after the siege in the year 410 they passed into Africa, where they more openly advanced their opinions.

It does not appear that Pelagius was animated by any desire to form a new doctrinal system, but rather to oppose what he considered moral indolence, and a worldly spirit among his brethren. Hence he maintained that man possessed inherent power for doing the will of God, and for reaching the highest degree of holiness. In this way his theological views were to a great extent formed and determined. But utterly false as they are, they were only

⁶⁹ *Eccles. Hist.* vol. 1, p. 366, Murdock and Soames. Robertson vol. 1, p. 316.

consistent with his rigid asceticism, and its native fruit. As scripture undeniably refers all good in man to the grace of God, Pelagius too, in a sense of his own, acknowledges this; but his ideas of divine grace were really nothing more than outward means to call forth man's efforts: a work of heavenly grace in the heart, and the operations of the Holy Spirit he did not think were needed. This led him to teach that the sin of our first parents had injured no one but themselves, that man is now born as innocent as Adam was when God created him, and possessed of the same moral power and purity. These doctrines, and such as are connected with them, especially the idea of man's free will — "an unbiassed power of choosing between good and evil," Pelagius and his colleague, Celestius, secretly disseminated in Rome, Sicily, Africa, and Palestine; but, excepting in the East, the novel opinions were generally condemned. There, John, bishop of Jerusalem, who considered the doctrines of Pelagius as agreeing with the opinions of Origen, to which John was attached, patronised Pelagius, allowing him to profess his sentiments freely, and to gather disciples.⁷⁰

AUGUSTINE AND DIVINE GRACE

Augustine the famous bishop of Hippo, the great evangelic light of the West, and the most influential of all the Latin christian writers, began about this time to assail with his pen the doctrines of Pelagius and Celestius; and to him chiefly is due, as God's instrument, the credit of checking the growth of this sect at that time. By a remarkable conversion, and by deep exercise of soul, he had been trained under the Lord's discipline for this great work. Thus did the all-wise God secretly raise up a testimony in opposition to Pelagius, and by means of his heresy, bring out more scriptural views of the gospel of grace than had been taught since the days of the apostles, and also fuller views of christian truth, holiness and humility. The Western churches, led on by Augustine continued perseveringly to assail the false doctrines with councils,

⁷⁰ "The fundamental error of the monk Pelagius was the denial of our total corruption by sin derived from Adam, and met only by the death and resurrection of the second Man, the last Adam. Hence he asserted liberty as now true of all men, not merely in the sense of exemption from external restraint, but of freedom within the nature as to good and evil, denying thus in the race internal bondage to sin. So he appears to have seen little more in grace, even in its christian application, than pardon for this or that offence, not the impartation to the believer of a new nature, in virtue of which he does not practice sin, because he is born of God. Thus no room was left in the Pelagian scheme for man being lost now on the one side, or for the believer being saved now on the other. In fact the race was conceived to be in an innocence like the primeval state of Adam till each sinned and thus fell under guilt and its consequences. The Pelagians denied the imputation of Adam's sin, seeing no more than the influence of a bad example. As the moral ruin of man was thus enfeebled and the relation of the head lost, so on the other hand under grace were reckoned all the natural endowments of the human family, as well as the supernatural. Hence conscience law, and gospel were regarded as different methods as well as advancing stages of righteousness, in every case the means and operations of grace being effectual only according to the measure of the tendencies of the will. Again, the redemption of Christ became thus, if not an amelioration, certainly an exaltation and transfiguration of humanity. Christ Himself was but the highest pattern of righteousness, some before Him having perfectly kept the moral law, and others since being stimulated by His work, love, and example to the evangelical counsels of moral perfection beyond law." — W.K.

books, and letters. The Gauls, the Britons, and even the Palestinians, by their councils, and the Emperors by their laws and penalties, so far crushed the controversy in its commencement; but the fundamental principles of Pelagianism in many forms and degrees remain to the present time. Rather, however, than pursue the history of this heresy, we will briefly refer to what the scriptures teach on the two main points of the subject.

REFLECTIONS ON THE CONDITION OF MAN AND THE GRACE OF GOD

If mere human reason be allowed in this controversy, it must be interminable; but if the authority of the word of God be owned, it is soon settled. That there is something good in fallen human nature, and that man, as such, has power to choose what is good and reject what is evil, lies at the root of Pelagianism in its numerous forms. The total ruin of man is denied, and all ideas of divine grace that appear inconsistent with man's free will are excluded from their system. But what saith the scripture? A single line of God's word satisfies the man of faith. And this ought to be the only argument of the teacher, the evangelist, and the private Christian. We must always take the ground of faith against all adversaries.

In Genesis 6 God gives His estimate of fallen human nature. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." God could find nothing in man but evil, and evil without cessation. Again, in the same chapter, we read, "And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth." Not *some* flesh, observe, but *all* flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. Here we have God's judgment of corrupt nature; but at the same time, He reveals His sovereign grace to meet the condition of man as thus judged. God provides an ark of salvation, and then sends forth the free invitation, — "Come thou and all thy house into the ark." The cross is the standing witness, and the grand expression, of the great truths shadowed forth by the ark. There we have in a way, as nowhere else, God's judgment of human nature with all its evil; and at the same time, the revelation of His love and grace in all their fulness and saving power.⁷¹

But all scripture is consistent with Genesis 6 and the cross of Christ. Take, for example, Romans 5 and Ephesians 2. In the former we are said to be "without strength," but in the latter, that we are "dead," dead in trespasses and sins. The apostle, in an earlier part of his Epistle to the Romans, most carefully proves the ruin of man and the righteousness of God; here we have His love displayed in the great fact of the death of Christ for us. "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." But why say the "*due time*"? Because man had been fully proved to be not only "*ungodly*," but "without strength" to do one good thing Godward, or move one step in that

⁷¹ For details see *Notes on the Book of Genesis*, p. 81.

direction. Under the law God showed man the way, appointed means, and gave him a long trial; but he was powerless to come out of his sad condition as a sinner. How humbling, but how wholesome, the truth of God! It is good to know our lost condition. How different from the false theology, and the proud philosophy of men! But on God's part, blessed be His name, man's state (so demonstrated) was just the opportunity for the manifestation of His saving grace; and for such Jesus died. "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Now man has to do either with God's judgment in unbelief, or with His salvation by faith. There is no middle path. The fullest proof of our lost condition and of God's gracious love is, "that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5: 6-10)

In Ephesians 2 it is not merely a question of man's moral disease, but of his *death*. "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." In Romans man is viewed as powerless, godless, a sinner, and an enemy; here, as morally dead: and this is the worst kind of death, for it is the very spring of the most active wickedness. "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." What a blow to man's boasted *unbiassed power* of choosing between good and evil! Here, on the contrary, he is viewed as under the government of demons — as the slave of Satan. Man will much more readily admit that he is godless than that he is powerless. He will boast of having his own opinion — of being independent and quite able to judge and choose for himself in spiritual things.

It was one of the favourite dogmas of Pelagius, if not the foundation of his system "That as man has ability to sin, so has he also not only ability to discern what is good, but likewise power to desire it and to perform it. And this is the freedom of the will, which is so essential to man that he cannot lose it." We refer to this false notion, simply because it so cleaves to the natural mind, and is most difficult to get rid of even after we are converted, being always a great hindrance to the work of God's grace in the soul. Since man is dead in his sins, God and His own work must be everything. Of course there is great variety amongst men naturally, when they are "fulfilling the desires of the flesh, and of the mind." Some are benevolent and moral, some living in gross and open wickedness, and some may be gratifying a kind and feeling heart: but from what motive? To do the will of God? Certainly not! God is not in all their thoughts. They are energized by the spirit of Satan, and driven by him according to the course of this world. "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (Luke 16:13)

HOW IS MAN RESPONSIBLE?

But where, it may be asked, and in what way does man's responsibility come in? Surely man is responsible to own that God is true, and to accept as just,

however humiliating, His Judgment of his nature and character. “If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.” Take up the dark picture which God has drawn of man, and say, That is myself, that is what I have done and what I am. Salvation is by faith; not by willing, choosing, doing, but by believing. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved... And this is the condemnation that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” (John 3: 16-19)

Who can fail to see that a responsibility is created by this display of divine goodness in Christ, and that of the most obvious, solemn, and weighty character? So much so indeed that the evidence is decisive and final, and the unbeliever judged before God. It is not a question, observe, of their not finding forgiveness, but of their preferring darkness to light that they may continue in sin. This is what God lays to their charge, and could there be a more just or reasonable ground of condemnation? Impossible. May it be the happy lot of all who read these pages to bow to the humiliating sentence of scripture upon our nature, and to take the ground of lost sinners in the sight of God. So shall an all-merciful and gracious God meet us in the greatness of His love, and bless us with all that is due to Christ as the Saviour of mankind.

THE NESTORIANS

As the sect, called Nestorians, occupies an important place in church history, we must briefly notice its formation. They are sometimes called **Syrians**, their founder being a Syrian. They are numerous, we believe in Syria at the present time but they have not received from the Turkish government that protection to which they are entitled, and hence they have been exposed to frequent assaults from the predatory tribes. Thousands of the **Nestorians** in the mountains of Kurdistan, including men, women, and children, were massacred in 1843, and their villages utterly destroyed, by the Kurdish tribes. Since the year 1834 an interesting mission has been established among them by the American Board of Foreign Missions. The character and proceedings of the mission are highly spoken of. Dr. Grant, one of the missionaries, who resided among the Nestorians for a considerable time, and had studied their manners and customs with the greatest minuteness and care, published a treatise with the view of proving that this interesting class of people are the descendants of the lost ten tribes of Israel. But his conclusions, like others on the same subject, may well be doubted.⁷²

Nestorius, a Syrian monk, became a presbyter of the church at Antioch. He was esteemed and celebrated on account of the rigid austerity of his life, and the impressive fervour of his preaching. He attracted large and attentive

⁷² See Gardner's *Faiths of the World*, vol. 2, p. 531.

audiences, and soon became a great favourite with the people. In the year 428 he was consecrated patriarch of Constantinople. But the discipline of the cloister had ill-prepared him for so important a position in public life. No sooner was he promoted to this elevation than he began to display an intemperate zeal against the various descriptions of heretics, which partook more of the bigotry of the monk than of the gentle forbearing spirit of genuine Christianity. In his inaugural discourse, addressing the Emperor, Theodosius the younger, he gave utterance to these violent expressions, "Give me a country purged of all heretics, and in exchange for it I will give you heaven. Help me to subdue the heretics, and I will help you to subdue the Persians." But it was not long till Nestorius himself was also accused of heresy.

The new bishop soon followed up his declaration of war against the heretics by deeds of violence and persecution. He excited tumults among the people: the Arians were attacked, their meeting-house burnt down, and other sects were persecuted. Such proceedings, however, soon raised up against Nestorius, even amongst the orthodox, a numerous host of enemies, who sought and soon accomplished his downfall. It happened in this way.

ANASTASIUS AND MARIOLATRY

Anastasius, a presbyter who had accompanied Nestorius from Antioch, and was his intimate friend, attacked, in a public discourse, the use of the expression, *Mother of God*, as applied to the Virgin Mary. The term thus violently opposed had on its side the authority of ancient usage, and many names of great weight with the people. Nestorius approved the discourse, supported his friend, and in several addresses explained and defended his attack. Many were pleased with these discourses, and many were stirred up against Nestorius and his friend: the excitement at Constantinople was immense, but the cry of *heresy, heresy*, arose, and the flames of a great and painful controversy were kindled.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NESTORIUS AND HIS OPPONENTS

Never was there a doctrinal strife in which the contending parties approximated so closely. Both subscribed, both appealed to, the Nicene creed: both believed in the absolute Godhead and the perfect manhood of the Lord Jesus; but it was inferred by the enemies of Nestorius, especially by *Cyril*, that he was unsound as to the *incarnation* from his objecting to the term, "mother of God." The meaning or import of the disputed term, as used by the doctors in the preceding century, was not to imply that the Virgin communicated the divine nature to the Saviour, but to affirm the union of Godhead and manhood in one Person — that "the child born, the son given," was God *incarnate*. It was attributed to Nestorius, that he maintained the mere humanity of the Redeemer, and that the Spirit only dwelt in Him after He became a man, as of

old in the prophets. But Nestorius, as long as he lived, professed himself utterly opposed to such sentiments. Nor does it appear that such sentiments were ever directly made by him, but only inferred by his adversaries from his rejection of the epithet, *Mother of God*, and from some incautious and ambiguous terms which he used in his public discourses on the subject.

CYRIL AND ORTHODOXY

Cyril, bishop of Alexandria, in the controversy which had thus arisen, appears as the great champion of orthodoxy. But all historians agree in giving him a most unchristianlike imperious, character. He is accused of being moved with jealousy because of the increasing power and authority of the bishop of Constantinople; and of being restless, arrogant and unscrupulous in his ways. He was also as violent against the heretics, as Nestorius. He persecuted the Novatianists, and expelled the Jews from Alexandria. An honest and pious zeal may have animated these great prelates, but they utterly failed in uniting with their zeal Christian prudence and moderation, and too readily allied with it the worst passions of human nature.

Cyril was first drawn into the controversy by finding that copies of Nestorius' sermons had been circulated among his monks in Egypt, and that they had abandoned the term Mother of God. He at once blamed both the monks and Nestorius, and denounced the novelty as heretical. All parties were soon excited, and angry words were used by all parties which need not now be repeated. Suffice it to say, that when Nestorius found that Cyril had skilfully managed to secure the influence of Celestine, bishop of Rome, and that he was beset with other difficulties, he appealed to a general council. As some of his opponents had already petitioned for such an assembly, it was agreed to, and the Emperor Theodosius issued orders for the meeting of one at Ephesus in the year 431, which is called the **Third General Council**. They met in June. Cyril, in virtue of the dignity of his see, presided. Matters went against Nestorius. He was condemned as guilty of blasphemy, deprived of the episcopal dignity, cut off from all part in the priesthood, and sent into banishment, in which he closed his days about the year 450.

About two hundred bishops signed the sentence against Nestorius, still it remains a question with most historians whether he was really guilty of holding the errors for which he was condemned. But all are agreed that he was rash and intemperate in his language, vain of his own eloquence, disregarded the writings of the earlier Fathers, and was apt to see heresy in everything that differed from the dogmatic phraseology which he had been accustomed to in his youth. But it is difficult to determine which was the principal cause of this great contest, *Cyril* or *Nestorius*.⁷³

⁷³ Landon's *Manual of Councils*, p. 225; Neander, vol. 4, p. 141; Mosheim, vol. 1, p. 468.

THE CLOSE OF THE PERGAMOS PERIOD

The council of Ephesus was far from putting an end to these disgraceful contentions; in place of restoring harmony to the church, it rather increased her troubles. John, bishop of Antioch, and other Eastern prelates, judged Cyril and his friends to have acted most unfairly and with unbecoming haste in the matter of Nestorius: hence arose a new controversy, and out of this sprang a new heresy — *Eutychianism* — which greatly troubled the Eastern churches for about twenty years.

Eutyches, abbot of a convent at Constantinople, in the eagerness of his opposition to Nestorianism, ran into the opposite extreme. He was accused of unsoundness on the doctrines of the incarnation, and denounced as a heretic. This led to another council which was held at Chalcedon in the year 451, and is called, **The Fourth General Council**. But the details of these local contests fall not within the limits of our “Short Papers.” Our plan is to give the reader a distinct outline, in the smallest space possible; and only to present a few details in cases where the name of the person has become a synonym for the opinions he taught; such as Arius, Pelagius, etc., or when the events, such as the great persecutions, have a claim on the sympathy of the church throughout all ages.

In carrying out these purposes, it will now be necessary to turn our attention more especially to the growing power and the lofty pretensions of the church of Rome. In **Leo the Great** we may see the passing away of the Pergamos period, and the approach of the papal monarchy. But before venturing on these troubled waters, we shall do well to study our divine chart — God’s prophetic history of the church during that dark and often stormy period.