STATE OF MATTERS BEFORE THE REFORMATION

Jean Henri Merle d'Aubigné

Preface

The history of one of the greatest revolutions that has ever been accomplished in human affairs -- of a mighty impulse communicated to the world three centuries ago, and whose influence is still visible on every side -- and not the history of a mere party, is the object of my present undertaking. The history of the Reformation is distinct from that of Protestantism. In the former every thing bears the mark of a regeneration of the human race -- of a religious and social change emanating from God himself. In the latter we too often witness a glaring degeneracy from first principles, the struggles of parties, a sectarian spirit, and the traces of petty individualities. The history of Protestantism may have an interest for Protestants only; the history of the Reformation addresses itself to all Christians, or rather to all mankind.

An historian may choose his subject in the wide field presented to his labors: he may describe the great events which have changed the aspect of a people or of the world; or on the other hand he may

record that tranquil onward course of a nation, of the Church, or of mankind, which usually succeeds every great social change. Both these departments of history are of vast importance; yet public interest has ever been more strongly attracted to those epochs which under the name of revolutions, have given fresh life to a nation, or created a new era for society in general.

It is a transformation of the latter kind that, with very humble powers, I have undertaken to describe, not without a hope that the beauty of the subject may compensate for my own deficiencies. The term “revolution,” which I here apply to it, has of late fallen into discredit with many individuals, who almost confound it with revolt. But they are wrong: for a revolution is merely a change in the affairs of men, -- something new unfolded (revolutus) from the bosom of humanity; and this very word, previous to the end of the last century, was more frequently used in a good than in a bad sense: a happy, a wonderful revolution, were the terms employed. The Reformation was quite the opposite of a revolt: it was the re-establishment of

the principles of primitive Christianity. It was a regenerative movement with respect to all that was destined to revive; a conservative movement as regards all that will exist for ever. While Christianity and the Reformation established the great principle of the equality of souls in the eyes of God, and overthrew the usurpations of a haughty priesthood that assumed to place itself between the Creator and his creature, they both laid down this fundamental rule of social order, that all power is derived from God, and called upon all men to “love the brotherhood, fear God, and honor the king.” The Reformation is eminently distinguished from all the revolutions of antiquity, and from most of those of modern times. Political changes -- the consolidation or the overthrow of the power of the one or of the many -- were the object of the latter. The love of truth, of holiness, of immortality, was the simple yet mighty spring which set in motion that which I have to describe. It indicates a forward movement in human nature.

In truth, man advances -- he improves, whenever he aims at higher objects, and seeks for

immaterial and imperishable blessings, instead of pursuing material, temporal, and earthly advantages. The Reformation is one of the brightest days of this glorious progress. It is a guarantee that the new struggle, which is receiving its accomplishment under our own eyes, will terminate on the side of truth, in a purer, more spiritual, and still nobler triumph.

Primitive Christianity and the Reformation are the two greatest revolutions in history. They were not limited to one nation only, as were the various political movements that history records; but their influence extended over many, and their effects are destined to be felt to the utmost limits of the world. Primitive Christianity and the Reformation are one and the same revolution, brought about at different epochs and under different circumstances. Although not alike in their secondary features, they are identical in their primary and chief characteristics. One is a repetition of the other. The former put an end to the old world; the latter began the new: between them lie the Middle Ages. One is the parent of the other; and although the daughter

may in some instances bear marks of inferiority, she had characters that are peculiarly her own.

One of them is the rapidity of its action. The great revolutions that have led to the fall of a monarchy, or wrought an entire change in a political system, or which have launched the human mind on a new career of development, have been slowly and gradually prepared. The oldestablished power has long been undermined: one by one its chief supports have given way. This was the case at the introduction of Christianity. But the Reformation, at the first glance, seems to present a different aspect.

The church of Rome under Leo X appears in the height of its power and glory. A monk speaks -- and in one half of Europe this mighty glory and power crumble into dust. In this revolution we are reminded of the words by which the Son of God foretells his second advent: “As the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be.” Such rapidity of action is inexplicable to those who

see in this event nothing more than a reform; who look upon it simply as an act of critical sagacity, which consisted in making a choice among various doctrines -- rejecting some, preserving others, and arranging those which were retained so as to combine them into a new system.

But how could a whole people, how could many nations have so promptly executed this laborious task? How could this critical examination have kindled the fire and enthusiasm so necessary for great and above all for sudden revolutions? The Reformation, as its history will show, was altogether different. It was a new outpouring of that life which Christianity brought into the world. It was the triumph of the greatest of its doctrines, -- of that which animates all who embrace it with the purest and most intense enthusiasm, -- the doctrine of Faith, the doctrine of Grace. Had the Reformation been what many Romanists and Protestants of our days imagine it, -- had it been that negative system of negative reason which, like a fretful child, rejects whatever is displeasing to it, and disowns the grand truths and leading ideas of

universal Christianity, it would never have crossed the threshold of the schools, or been known beyond the narrow limits of the cloister or perhaps of the friar's cell. But with Protestantism, as many understand the word, it had no connection. Far from being an emaciated, an enervated body, it rose up like a man full of strength and energy.

Two considerations will account for the suddenness and extent of this revolution. One must be sought in God; the other among men. The impulse was given by an invisible and mighty hand: the change accomplished was the work of Omnipotence. An impartial and attentive observer, who looks beyond the surface, must necessarily be led to this conclusion. But as God works by second causes, another task remains for the historian. Many circumstances which have often passed unnoticed, gradually prepared the world for the great transformation of the sixteenth century, so that the human mind was ripe when the hour of its emancipation arrived.

It is the historian's duty to combine these two

great elements in the picture he presents to his readers. This has been my endeavor in the following pages. I shall be easily understood so long as I am occupied in investigating the secondary causes that concurred in producing the revolution I have undertaken to describe. Many perhaps will understand me less clearly, and will even be tempted to charge me with superstition, when I ascribe the completion of the work to God. It is a conviction, however, that I fondly cherish. These volumes, as well as the motto I have prefixed to them, lay down in the chief and foremost place this simple and pregnant principle: God in History. But as it is a principle that has been generally neglected and sometimes disputed, it may be right for me to explain my views on this subject, and by this means justify the method I have adopted.

History can no longer remain in our days that dead letter of events, to the detail of which the majority of earlier writers restricted themselves. It is now understood that in history, as in man, there are two elements -- matter and spirit. Unwilling to

resign themselves to the task of producing a simple recital of facts, which would have been but a barren chronicle, our great modern historians have sought for a vital principle to animate the materials of past ages.

Some have borrowed this principle from the rules of art: they have aimed at being ingenuous, exact, and picturesque in description, and have endeavored to give life to their narrative by the characteristic details of the events themselves.

Others have sought in philosophy the principle that should fertilize their labors. With the relation of events they have interwoven extended views, instructive lessons, political and philosophical truths; and have given animation to their narrative by the idea they have drawn from it, and by the theory they have been able to associate with it.

Both these methods, undoubtedly, are good, and should be employed within certain limits. But there is another source to which, above all, we must look for the intelligence, spirit, and life of

past ages; and this source is Religion. History should live by that life which belongs to it, and that life is God. In history, God should be acknowledged and proclaimed. The history of the world should be set forth as the annals of the government of the Sovereign King.

I have gone down into the lists whither the recitals of our historians have invited me. There I have witnessed the actions of men and of nations, developing themselves with energy, and contending in violent collision. I have heard a strange din of arms, but I have been nowhere shown the majestic countenance of the presiding Judge.

And yet there is a living principle, emanating from God, in every national movement. God is ever present on that vast theater where successive generations of men meet and struggle. It is true he is unseen; but if the heedless multitude pass by without caring for him because he is “a God that dwelleth in the thick darkness,” thoughtful men, who yearn for the very principle of their existence,

seek for him the more ardently, and are not satisfied until they lie prostrate at his feet. And their inquiries meet with a rich reward. For from the height to which they have been compelled to soar to meet their God, the history of the world, instead of presenting to their eyes a confused chaos, as it does to the ignorant crowd, appears as a majestic temple, on which the invisible hand of God himself is at work, and which rises to his glory above the rock of humanity.

Shall we not recognize the hand of God in those grand manifestations, those great men, those mighty nations, which arise, and start as it were from the dust of the earth, and communicate a fresh impulse, a new form and destiny to the human race? Shall we not acknowledge him in those heroes who spring from society at appointed epochs -- who display a strength and activity beyond the ordinary limits of humanity -- and around whom, as around a superior and mysterious power, nations and individuals unhesitatingly gather? Who has launched into the expanse of time, those huge comets with their fiery trains, which

appear but at distant intervals, scattering among the superstitious crowd abundance and joy, calamity and terror? Who, if not God? Alexander sought his origin in the abodes of the Divinity. And in the most irreligious age there has been no eminent glory that has not endeavored in some way or other to connect itself with heaven.

And do not those revolutions which hurl kings from their thrones, and precipitate whole nations to the dust, -- do not those wide-spread ruins which the traveler meets with among the sands of the desert, -- do not those majestic relics which the field of humanity presents to our view; do they not all declare aloud -- a God in history? Gibbon, seated among the ruins of the Capitol, and contemplating its august remains, owned the intervention of a superior destiny. He saw it -- he felt it: in vain would he avert his eyes. That shadow of a mysterious power started from behind every broken pillar; and he conceived the design of describing its influence in the history of the disorganization, decline, and corruption of that Roman dominion which had enslaved the world.

Shall not we discern amidst the great ruins of humanity that almighty hand which a man of noble genius -- one who had never bent the knee to Christ -- perceived amid the scattered fragments of the monuments of Romulus, the sculptured marbles of Aurelius, the busts of Cicero and Virgil, the statues of Caesar and Augustus, Pompey's horses, and the trophies of Trajan, -- and shall we not confess it to be the hand of God?

What a startling fact, that men brought up amid the elevated ideas of Christianity, regard as mere superstition that Divine intervention in human affairs which the very heathens had admitted!

The name given by ancient Greece to the Sovereign Ruler shows it to have received primeval revelations of the great truth of a God, who is the principle of history and the life of nations. He was styled Zeus, f1 or the life-giver to all that lives, -- to nations as well as to individuals. On his altars kings and people swore their solemn oaths; and from his mysterious inspirations Minos and other legislators pretended to have received their laws.

This is not all: this great truth is figured forth by one of the most beautiful fables of heathen antiquity. Even mythology might teach a lesson to the philosophers of our days; and I may be allowed to establish the fact, as perhaps there are readers who will feel less prejudice against he instructions of paganism than of Christianity itself. This Zeus, this supreme Ruler, this Eternal Spirit, this life-giving Principle, is the father of Clio, the muse of history, whose mother is Mnemosyne or Memory.

Thus, according to the notions of antiquity, history combines a heavenly with an earthly nature. She is the daughter of God and man; but, alas! the purblind philosophy of our proud age is far from having attained the lofty views of that heathen wisdom. Her divine paternity has been denied; and the illegitimate child now wanders up and down the world, like a shameless adventurer, hardly knowing whence she comes or whither she is going.

But this God of pagan antiquity is only a faint reflection, a dim shadow of Jehovah -- of the

Eternal One. The true God whom the Hebrews worship, willing to impress on the minds of all nations that he reigns continually upon earth, gave with this intent, if I may venture the expression, a bodily form to this sovereignty in the midst of Israel. A visible theocracy was appointed to exist once upon the earth, that it might unceasingly remind us of that invisible theocracy which shall for ever govern the world.

And see what luster this great truth (God in history) receives under the Christian dispensation. What is Jesus Christ, if he be not God in history?

It was this discovery of Jesus Christ which enable John Muller, the greatest of modern historians, fully to comprehend his subject. “The Gospel,” said he, “is the fulfillment of every hope, the perfection of all philosophy, the interpreter of every revolution, the key to all the seeming contradictions in the physical and moral world: it is life and immortality.

Since I have known the Savior, every thing is

clear to my eyes: with him, there is no difficulty I cannot solve.” f2 Thus wrote this eminent historian; and is not this great truth, that God has appeared in human nature, in reality the keystone of the arch, -- the mysterious link which binds all earthly things together, and connects them with heaven? History records a birth of God, and yet God has no part in history! Jesus Christ is the true God of man’s history: it is shown by the very meanness of his advent. When man would raise a shelter against the weather -- a shade from the heat of the sun -- what preparation of materials, what scaffolding and crowds of workmen, what trenches and heaps of rubbish! -- but when God would do the same, he takes the smallest seed that a new-born child might clasp in its feeble hand, deposits it in the bosom of the earth, and from that grain, scarcely distinguishable in its commencement, he produces the stately tree, under whose spreading branches the families of men may find a refuge. To effect great results by imperceptible means -- such is the law of God.

In Jesus Christ is found the most glorious

fulfillment of this law.

Christianity has now taken possession of the gates of every people. It reigns or hovers over all the tribes of the earth, from the rising to the setting sun; and even a skeptical philosophy is compelled to acknowledge it as the social and spiritual law of the world. And yet what was the commencement of this religion, the noblest of all things under the vault of heaven -- nay, in the “infinite immense” of creation? A child born in the smallest town of the most despised nation in the world -- a child whose mother had not what even the most indigent and wretched woman of our towns possesses, a room to shelter her in the hour of travail -- a child born in a stable and cradled in a manger! In this, O God, I acknowledge and adore thee!

The Reformation recognized this divine law, and was conscious of fulfilling it. The idea that “God is in history” was often put forth by the reformers.

We find it particularly expressed by Luther in

one of those homely and quaint, yet not undignified similitudes, which he was fond of using that he might be understood by the people. “The world,” said he one day at table with his friends, “is a vast and magnificent game of cards, made up of emperors, kings, princes, etc. The pope for many centuries beat the emperors, kings and princes. They yielded and fell before him. Then came our Lord God. He dealt the cards: he took the lowest (Luther) for himself, and with it he beat the pope, that vanquisher of the kings of the earth.....This is the ace of God. As Mary said: ‘He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.’” f3 The epoch whose history I am desirous of retracing is important for the present generation. When a man becomes sensible of his own weakness, he is generally inclined to look for support in the institutions he sees flourishing around him, or else in the bold devices of his imagination. The history of the Reformation shows that nothing new can be made out of things old; and that if, according to our Savior’s expression, we require new bottles for new wine, we must also have new wine for new bottles. It directs man to

God as the universal agent in history, -- to that Divine word, ever old by the eternal nature of the truths it contains, ever new by the regenerative influence that it exerts; which purified society three centuries ago, which restored faith in God to souls enfeebled by superstition, and which, at every epoch in the history of man, is the fountain whence floweth salvation.

It is singular to witness a great number of men, agitated by a vague desire of believing in something fixed, addressing themselves in our days to the erroneous Catholicism of Rome. In one sense this movement is natural: religion is so little known among them, that they think it can only be found where they see it inscribed in large letters on a banner that time has rendered venerable. I do not say that all Catholicism is incapable of bestowing on man what he stands in need of. I think we should carefully distinguish between Catholicism and Popery. The latter, in my opinion, is an erroneous and destructive system; but I am far from confounding it with Catholicism. How many worthy men, how many true Christians, has not the

catholic church contained within its bosom! What important services were rendered by Catholicism to the existing states of Europe, at the moment of their formation -- at a period when it was still deeply impregnated with the Gospel, and when Popery was as yet only hovering over it like a faint shadow! But we live no longer in those days. Strenuous endeavors are now making to reunite Catholicism with Popery; and if catholic and christian truths are put forward, they are merely to serve as baits to draw us into the nets of the hierarchy. We have nothing, then, to hope for on that side. Has Popery renounced one of its observances, of its doctrines, or of its assumptions? Will that religion which was insupportable in former times be less so in ours? What regeneration has ever been known to emanate from Rome? Is it from a pontifical hierarchy, overflowing with earthly passions, that can proceed the spirit of faith, hope, and charity, which alone can save us? Is it an exhausted system, that has no vitality for itself, which is everywhere in the struggles of death, and which exists only by external aid, that can impart life to others, or animate Christian society with the

heavenly inspiration that it requires?

Will this yearning of the heart and mind that begins to be felt by many of our contemporaries, lead others to apply to the new Protestantism which in many places has succeeded the powerful teaching of the apostles and reformers? A great vagueness in doctrine prevails in many of those reformed churches whose first members sealed with their blood the clear and living faith that inspired them. Men distinguished for their information, and sensible to all the beauties which this world presents, are carried away into strange aberrations. A general faith in the divinity of the Gospel is the only standard they are willing to uphold. But what is this Gospel? That is the vital question; and yet on this, either they are silent, or else every one answers it according to his own opinions. What avails it to know that God has placed in the midst of all nations a vessel containing a remedy for our souls, if we care not to know its contents, or if we do not strive to appropriate them to ourselves? This system cannot fill up the void of the present times. While the faith

of the apostles and reformers appears everywhere active and effectual for the conversion of the world, this vague system does nothing -- enlightens nothing -- vivifies nothing.

But let us not be without hope. Does not Roman-Catholicism confess the great doctrines of Christianity, -- God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost -- Creator, Savior, and Sanctifier, who is the Truth? And does not this vague Protestantism hold in its hand the Book of Life, which is sufficient for doctrine, correction, and instruction in righteousness? And how many upright souls, honored in the eyes of men, lovely in the sight of God, are there not to be found among those subjected to these two systems? How can we forbear loving them? How not ardently desire their complete emancipation from human elements? Charity is infinite: it embraces the most distant opinions, to draw them to the feet of Christ.

Already there are indications that these two extreme opinions are moving nearer to Christ, who is the center of truth. Are there not some

Romancatholic churches in which the reading of the Bible is recommended and practiced? And what steps has not Protestant rationalism already made! It did not spring from the Reformation: for the history of that great revolution will prove it to have been an epoch of faith. But may we not hope it is drawing nearer to it? Will not the might of truth go forth to it from the Word of God, and will not this rationalism be transformed by it?

Already we often witness in it a religious feeling, inadequate doubtless, but still it is a movement towards sound doctrine, and which may lead us to hope for some definite progress.

But the new Protestantism and the old Catholicism are of themselves irrelevant and ineffectual. We require something else to restore the saving power to the men of our days. We need something which is not of man -- something that comes from God. “Give me,” said Archimedes, “a point without the world, and I will lift it from its poles.” True Christianity is this point, which raises the heart of man from its double pivot of

selfishness and sensuality, and which will one day turn the whole world from its evil ways, and make it revolve on a new axis of righteousness and peace.

Whenever religion has been under discussion, there have been three points to which our attention has been directed. God, Man, and the Priest. There can only be three kinds of religion upon earth, according as God, Man, or the Priest, is its author and its head. I denominate that the religion of the priest, which is invented by the priest, for the glory of the priest, and in which a sacerdotal caste is dominant. By the religion of man, I mean those various systems and opinions which human reason has framed, and which, being the offspring of human infirmity, are consequently devoid of all healing power. The term divine religion I apply to the truth such as God gave it, -- the end and aim of which are the glory of God and the salvation of man.

Hierarchism, or the religion of the priest -- Christianity, or the religion of God -- Rationalism,

or the religion of man, are the three doctrines that divide Christendom in our days. There is no salvation, either for man or for society, in the first or in the last. Christianity alone can give life to the world; and, unhappily, of the three prevailing systems, it is not that which has the greatest number of followers.

Some, however, it has. Christianity is operating its work of regeneration among many Catholics in Germany, and no doubt in other countries also.

It is accomplishing its task with greater purity and vigor, in my opinion, among the evangelical Christians of Switzerland, France, Great Britain, and the United States. God be praised that these individual or social regenerations, produced by the Gospel, are no longer such rarities as must be sought in ancient annals.

It is the history of the Reformation in general that I desire to write. I purpose tracing it among different nations, to show that the same truths have everywhere produced the same results, and also to

point out the diversities arising from the dissimilar characters of the people. It is especially in Germany that we find the primitive type of this reform: there it presents the most organic developments, -- there chiefly it bears the character of a revolution not limited to a particular nation, but which concerns the whole world. The Reformation in Germany is the fundamental history of the reform -- it is the primary planet; the other reformations are secondary planets, revolving with it, deriving light from the same source, forming part of the same system, but each having a separate existence, shedding each a different radiance, and always possessing a peculiar beauty. We may apply the language of St. Paul to these reforms of the sixteenth century: “There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory.” 1 Corinthians 15:41. The Swiss Reformation occurred at the same time as the German, but was independent of it. It presented, at a later period especially, some of the great features observable in that of Germany. The Reformation in Great Britain recommends itself in

a very especial manner to our attention, from the powerful influence which the churches of that country are exerting at the present day over all the world. But recollections of ancestry and of refuge -- the remembrance of struggles, suffering, and exile endured in the cause of the Reformation in France, lend a particular attraction, in my eyes, to the French reform. Considered by itself, and with respect to the date of its origin, it presents beauties that are peculiarly its own.

I believe the Reformation to be the work of God: his hand is everywhere visible in it. Still I hope to be impartial in retracing its history. I think I have spoken of the principal Roman-catholic actors in this great drama -- of Leo X, Albert of Magdeburg, Charles V, and Doctor Eck, for instance, more favorably than the majority of historians have done. On the other hand, I have had no desire to conceal the faults and errors of the reformers.

As early as the winter of 1831-32, I delivered a course of public lectures on the epoch of the

Reformation. I then published my opening discourse. f4 These lectures were a preparatory labor for the history I now lay before the public.

This history is compiled from the original sources with which a long residence in Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, has rendered me familiar; as well as from the study, in their original languages, of the documents relating to the religious history of Great Britain and other countries. As these sources will be pointed out in the course of the work, it will be unnecessary to enumerate them here.

I should have wished to authenticate the various portions of my work by many original notes; but I feared that if they were long and frequent, they would prove a disagreeable interruption to my readers. I have therefore confined myself to such passages as seemed calculated to give them a clearer view of the history I have undertaken to write.

I address this history to those who love to see

past events exactly as they occurred, and not by the aid of that magic glass of genius which colors and magnifies, but which sometimes also diminishes and changes them. Neither the philosophy of the eighteenth nor the romanticism of the nineteenth century will guide my judgments or supply my colors. The history of the Reformation is written in the spirit of the work itself. Principles, it is said, have no modesty. It is their nature to rule, and they steadily assert their privilege. Do they encounter other principles in their paths that would dispute their empire, they give battle immediately. A principle never rests until it has gained the victory; and it cannot be otherwise -- with it to reign is to live. If it does not reign supreme, it dies. Thus, at the same time that I declare my inability and unwillingness to enter into rivalry with other historians of the Reformation, I make an exception in favor of the principles on which this history is founded, and I firmly maintain their superiority.

Up to this hour we do not possess, as far as I am aware, any complete history of the memorable epoch that is about to employ my pen. Nothing

indicated that this deficiency would be supplied when I began this work.

This is the only circumstance that could have induced me to undertake it, and I here put it forward as my justification. This deficiency still exists; and I pray to Him from whom cometh every good and perfect gift, to grant that this humble work may not be profitless to my readers.

J. H. MERLE D’AUBIGNE, D. D.

Eaux-Vives, near Geneva, August 1835.

Chapter 1

Christianity

The enfeebled world was tottering on its foundations when Christianity appeared. The national religions which had satisfied the parents, no longer proved sufficient for their children. The new generations could not repose contented within the ancient forms. The gods of every nation, when transported to Rome, there lost their oracles, as the nations themselves had there lost their liberty. Brought face to face in the Capitol, they had destroyed each other, and their divinity had vanished. A great void was occasioned in the religion of the world.

A kind of deism, destitute alike of spirit and of life, floated for a time above the abyss in which the vigorous superstitions of antiquity had been engulfed. But like all negative creeds, it had no power to reconstruct.

National prepossessions disappeared with the

fall of the national gods.

The various kingdoms melted one into the other. In Europe, Asia, and Africa, there was but one vast empire, and the human race began to feel its universality and unity.

Then the WORD was made flesh.

God appeared among men, and as man, to save that which was lost. In Jesus of Nazareth dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

This is the greatest event in the annals of the world. Former ages had prepared the way for it: The latter ages flow from it. It is the center of their bond of unity.

Henceforward the popular superstitions had no meaning, and the slight fragments preserved from the general wreck of incredulity vanished before the majestic orb of eternal truth.

The son of man lived thirty-three years on

earth, healing the sick, converting sinners, not having where to lay his head, and displaying in the midst of this humiliation such greatness and holiness, such power and divinity, as the world had never witnessed before. He suffered and died — he rose again and ascended into heaven. His disciples, beginning at Jerusalem, traveled over the Roman empire and the world, everywhere proclaiming their Master as the author of everlasting life. From the midst of a people who despised all nations, came forth a mercy that invited and embraced all men. A great number of Asiatics, of Greeks, and of Romans, hitherto dragged by their priests to the feet of dumb idols, believed the Word. It suddenly enlightened the whole earth, like a beam of the sun. A breath of life began to move over this wide field of death. A new people, a holy nation, was formed upon the earth; and the astonished world beheld in the disciples of the Galilean a purity and self-denial, a charity and heroism, of which it had retained no idea.

Two principles especially distinguished the new religion from all the human systems that fled

before it. One had reference to the ministers of its worship, the other to its doctrines.

The ministers of paganism were almost the gods of these human religions.

The priests of Egypt, Gaul, Dacia, Germany, Britain, and India, led the people, so long at least as their eyes were not opened. Jesus Christ, indeed, established a ministry, but he did not found a separate priesthood: he dethroned these living idols of the world, destroyed an overbearing hierarchy, took away from man what he had taken from God, and reestablished the soul in immediate connection with the divine fountain of truth, by proclaiming himself sole Master and sole Mediator. “One is your master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.” As regards doctrine, human systems had taught that salvation is of man: the religions of the earth had devised an earthly salvation. They had told men that heaven would be given to them as a reward: they had fixed its price; and what a price! The religion of God taught that salvation comes from him alone; that it is a gift from heaven; that it

emanates from an amnesty — from the grace of the Sovereign Ruler: “God hath given to us eternal life.” Undoubtedly Christianity cannot be summed up in these two points; but they seem to govern the subject, as far as history is concerned. And as it is impossible for me to trace the opposition between truth and error in all its features, I have been compelled to select the most prominent.

Such were the two constituent principles of the religion that then took possession of the Roman empire and of the world. With these we are within the true limits of Christianity, and beyond them Christianity disappears. On their preservation or their loss depended its greatness or its fall. They are closely connected: for we cannot exalt the priests of the Church or the works of the faithful without lowering Christ in his twofold quality of Mediator and Redeemer. One of these principles was to predominate in the history of the religion; the other in its doctrine. They both reigned at the beginning. Let us inquire how they were lost; and let us commence by tracing the destiny of the former.

The Church was in the beginning a community of brethren, guided by a few of the brethren. All were taught of God, and each had the privilege of drawing for himself from the divine fountain of light. The Epistles which then settled the great questions of doctrine did not bear the pompous title of a single man — of a ruler. We learn from the Holy Scriptures, that they began simply with these words: “The apostles and elders and brethren send greetings unto the brethren.” But these very writings of the apostles already foretell that from the midst of this brotherhood there shall arise a power that will destroy this simple and primitive order. Let us contemplate the formation and trace the development of this power so alien to the Church.

Paul of Tarsus, one of the greatest apostles of the new religion, had arrived at Rome, the capital of the empire and of the world, preaching in bondage the salvation which cometh from God. A Church was formed beside the throne of the Caesars. Composed at first of a few converted

Jews, Greeks, and Roman citizens, it was rendered famous by the teaching and the death of the Apostle of the Gentiles.

For a time it shone out brightly, as a beacon upon a hill. Its faith was everywhere celebrated; but erelong it declined from its primitive condition. It was by small beginnings that both imperial and Christian Rome advanced to the usurped dominion of the world.

The first pastors or bishops of Rome early employed them- selves in converting the neighboring cities and towns. The necessity which the bishops and pastors of the Campagna felt of applying in cases of difficulty to an enlightened guide, and the gratitude they owed to the church of the metropolis, led them to maintain a close union with it. As it has always happened in analogous circumstances, this reasonable union soon degenerated into dependence. The bishops of Rome considered as a right that superiority which the surrounding Churches had freely yielded. The encroachments of power form a great part of

history; as the resistance of those whose liberties are invaded forms the other portion. The ecclesiastical power could not escape the intoxication which impels all who are lifted up to seek to mount still higher. It obeyed this general law of human nature.

Nevertheless the supremacy of the Roman bishops was at that period limited to the superintendence of the Churches within the civil jurisdiction of the prefect of Rome. But the rank which this imperial city held in the world offered a prospect of still greater destinies to the ambition of its first pastor. The respect enjoyed by the various Christian bishops in the second century was proportionate to the rank of the city in which they resided. Now Rome was the largest, richest, and most powerful city in the world. It was the seat of empire, the mother of nations. “All the inhabitants of the earth belong to her,” said Julian; and Claudian declared her to be “the fountain of laws.” If Rome is the queen of cities, why should not her pastor be the king of bishops? Why should not the Roman church be the mother of Christendom?

Why should not all nations be her children, and her authority their sovereign law? It was easy for the ambitious heart of man to reason thus. Ambitious Rome did so.

Thus, when pagan Rome fell, she bequeathed to the humble minister of the God of peace, sitting in the midst of her ruins, the proud titles which her invincible sword had won from the nations of the earth.

The bishops of the different parts of the empire, fascinated by that charm which Rome had exercised for ages over all nations, followed the example of the Campagna, and aided this work of usurpation. They felt a pleasure in yielding to the bishop of Rome some portion of that honor which was due to the queen of the world. There was originally no dependence implied in the honor thus paid. They treated the Roman pastor as if they were on a level with him. But usurped power increased like an avalanche.

Admonitions, at first simply fraternal, soon

became absolute commands in the mouth of the pontiff. A foremost place among equals appeared to him a throne.

The Western bishops favored this encroachment of the Roman pastors, either from jealousy of the Eastern bishops, or because they preferred submitting to the supremacy of a pope, rather than to the dominion of a temporal power.

On the other hand, the theological sects that distracted the East, strove, each for itself, to interest Rome in its favor they looked for victory in the support of the principal church of the West.

Rome carefully enregistered these applications and intercessions, and smiled to see all nations voluntarily throwing themselves into her arms.

She neglected no opportunity of increasing and extending her power. The praises and flattery, the exaggerated compliments and consultations of other Churches, became in her eyes and in her hands the titles and documents of her authority.

Such is man exalted to a throne: the incense of courts intoxicates him, his brain grows dizzy. What he possesses becomes a motive for attaining still more.

The doctrine of the Church and the necessity of its visible unity, which had begun to gain ground in the third century, favored the pretensions of Rome. The Church is, above all things, the assembly of “them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus” (1 Corinthians 1:2) — ”the assembly of the first-born which are written in heaven” (Hebrews 12:23).

Yet the Church of our Lord is not simply inward and invisible; it is necessary that it should be manifested, and it is with a view to this manifestation that the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper were instituted. The visible Church has features different from those which distinguish it as an invisible Church. The invisible Church, which is the body of Christ, is necessarily and eternally one. The visible Church no doubt partakes of the unity of the former; but, considered by itself, plurality is a characteristic already

ascribed to it in the New Testament.

While speaking of one Church of God, it no sooner refers to its manifestation to the world, than it enumerates “the Churches of Galatia, of Macedonia, of Judea, all Churches of the saints.” These Churches may undoubtedly, to a certain extent, look for visible unity; but if this union be wanting, they lose none of the essential qualities of the Church of Christ.

The strong bond which originally united the members of the Church, was that living faith of the heart which connected them all with Christ as their common head. Different causes soon concurred to originate and develop the idea of a necessity for external union. Men accustomed to the political forms and associations of an earthly country, carried their views and habits into the spiritual and eternal kingdom of Christ. Persecution, powerless to destroy or even to shake this new community, made it only the more sensible of its own strength, and pressed it into a more compact body. To the errors that sprung up in the theosophic schools and

in the various sects, was opposed the one and universal truth received from the apostles, and preserved in the Church. This was well, so long as the invisible and spiritual Church was identical with the visible and external Church. But a great separation took place erelong: the form and the life became disunited.

The semblance of an identical and exterior organization was gradually substituted for that interior and spiritual communion, which is the essence of the religion of God. Men forsook the precious perfume of faith, and bowed down before the empty vessel that had contained it. They sought other bonds of union, for faith in the heart no longer connected the members of the Church; and they were united by means of bishops, archbishops, popes, mitres, canons, and ceremonies. The living Church retiring gradually within the lonely sanctuary of a few solitary hearts, an external Church was substituted in its place, and all its forms were declared to be of divine appointment. Salvation no longer flowing from the Word, which was henceforward put out of sight, the priests

affirmed that it was conveyed by means of the forms they had themselves invented, and that no one could attain it except by these channels. No one, said they, can by his own faith attain to everlasting life. Christ communicated to the apostles, and these to the bishops, the unction of the Holy Spirit; and this Spirit is to be procured only in that order of succession! Originally, whoever possessed the spirit of Jesus Christ was a member of the Church; now the terms were inverted, and it was maintained that he only who was a member of the Church could receive the Spirit. As these ideas became established, the distinction between the people and the clergy was more strongly marked. The salvation of souls no longer depended entirely on faith in Christ, but also, and in a more especial manner, on union with the Church.

The representatives and heads of the Church were made partakers of the trust that should be placed in Christ alone, and became the real mediators of their flocks. The idea of a universal Christian priesthood was gradually lost sight of; the

servants of the Church of Christ were compared to the priests of the old covenant; and those who separated from the bishop were placed in the same rank with Korah, Dathan, and Abiram! From a peculiar priesthood, such as was then formed in the Church, to a sovereign priesthood, such as Rome claims, the transition was easy.

In fact, no sooner was the erroneous notion of the necessity for a visible unity of the Church established, than another appeared — the necessity for an outward representation of that union. Although we find no traces in the Gospel of Peter's superiority over the other apostles; although the very idea of a primacy is opposed to the fraternal relations which united the brethren, and even to the spirit of the Gospel dispensation, which on the contrary requires all the children of the Father to "minister one to another," acknowledging only one teacher and one master; although Christ had strongly rebuked his disciples, whenever ambitious desires of preeminence were conceived in their carnal hearts the primacy of St. Peter was invented and supported by texts wrongly interpreted, and

men next acknowledged in this apostle and in his self-styled successors at Rome, the visible representatives of visible unity — the heads of the universal Church.

The constitution of the Patriarchate contributed in like manner to the exaltation of the Papacy. As early as the three first centuries the metropolitan Churches had enjoyed peculiar honor. The council of Nice, in its sixth canon, mentions three cities, whose Churches, according to it, exercised a long-established authority over those of the surrounding provinces: these were Alexandria, Rome, and Antioch. The political origin of this distinction is indicated by the name which was at first given to the bishops of these cities: they were called Exarchs, from the title of the civil governors. Somewhat later they received the more ecclesiastical appellation of Patriarchs. We find this title first employed at the council of Constantinople, but in a different sense from that which it afterwards received. It was not until shortly before the council of Chalcedon that it was given exclusively to the great metropolitans. The

second general council created a new patriarchate, that of Constantinople itself, the new Rome, the second capital of the empire. The church of Byzantium, so long obscure, enjoyed the same privileges, and was placed by the council of Chalcedon in the same rank as the Church of Rome. Rome at that time shared the patriarchal supremacy with these three churches. But when the Mahometan invasion had destroyed the sees of Alexandria and of Antioch, — when the see of Constantinople fell away, and in later times even separated from the West, Rome remained alone, and the circumstances of the times gathered all the Western Churches around her see, which from that time has been without a rival.

New and more powerful friends than all the rest soon came to her assistance. Ignorance and superstition took possession of the Church, and delivered it, fettered and blindfold, into the hands of Rome.

Yet this bondage was not effected without a struggle. Frequently did the Churches proclaim

their independence; and their courageous voices were especially heard from Proconsular Africa and from the East. But Rome found new allies to stifle the cries of the churches. Princes, whom those stormy times often shook upon their thrones, offered their protection if Rome would in its turn support them. They conceded to her the spiritual authority, provided she would make a return in secular power.

They were lavish of the souls of men, in the hope that she would aid them against their enemies. The power of the hierarchy which was ascending, and the imperial power which was declining, leant thus one upon the other, and by this alliance accelerated their twofold destiny.

Rome could not lose by it. An edict of Theodosius II and of Valentinian III proclaimed the Roman bishop “rector of the whole Church.” Justinian published a similar decree. These edicts did not contain all that the popes pretended to see in them; but in those times of ignorance it was easy for them to secure that interpretation which was

most favorable to themselves. The dominion of the emperors in Italy becoming daily more precarious, the bishops of Rome took advantage of this circumstance to free themselves from their dependence.

But already had issued from the forests of the North the most effectual promoters of the papal power. The barbarians who had invaded and settled in the West, after being satiated with blood and plunder, lowered their reeking swords before the intellectual power that met them face to face. Recently converted to Christianity, ignorant of the spiritual character of the Church, and feeling the want of a certain external pomp in religion, they prostrated themselves, half savage and half heathen as they were, at the feet of the high-priest of Rome. With their aid the West was in his power. At first the Vandals, then the Ostrogoths, somewhat later the Burgundians and Alans, next the Visigoths, and lastly the Lombards and Anglo-Saxons, came and bent the knee to the Roman pontiff. It was the sturdy shoulders of those children of the idolatrous north that succeeded in placing on the supreme

throne of Christendom a pastor of the banks of the Tiber.

At the beginning of the seventh century these events were accomplishing in the West, precisely at the period when the power of Mahomet arose in the East, prepared to invade another quarter of the world.

From this time the evil continued to increase. In the eighth century we see the Roman bishops resisting on the one hand the Greek emperors, their lawful sovereigns, and endeavoring to expel them from Italy, while with the other they court the mayors of the palace in France, begging from this new power, just beginning to rise in the West, a share in the wreck of the empire. Rome founded her usurped authority between the East, which she repelled, and the West, which she summoned to her aid. She raised her throne between two revolts. Startled by the shouts of the Arabs, now become masters of Spain, and who boasted that they would speedily arrive in Italy by the gates of the Pyrenees and Alps, and proclaim the name of Mahomet on

the Seven Hills; alarmed at the insolence of Astolphus, who at the head of his Lombards, roaring like a lion, and brandishing his sword before the gates of the eternal city, threatened to put every Roman to death: Rome, in the prospect of ruin, turned her frightened eyes around her, and threw herself into the arms of the Franks. The usurper Pepin demanded her pretended sanction of his new authority; it was granted, and the Papacy obtained in return his promise to be the defender of the “Republic of God.” Pepin wrested from the Lombards the cities they had taken from the Greek emperor; yet, instead of restoring them to that prince, he laid they keys on St. Peter’s altar, and swore with uplifted hands that he had not taken up arms for man, but to obtain from God the remission of his sins, and to do homage for his conquests to St. Peter.

Thus did France establish the temporal power of the popes.

Charlemagne appeared; the first time he ascends the stairs to the basilic of St. Peter,

devoutly kissing each step. A second time he presents himself, lord of all the nations that formed the empire of the West, and of Rome itself. Leo III thought fit to bestow the imperial title on him who already possessed the power; and on Christmas day, in the year 800, he placed the diadem of the Roman emperors on the brow of the son of Pepin. From this time the pope belongs to the empire of the Franks: his connection with the East is ended. He broke off from a decayed and falling tree to graft himself upon a wild and vigorous sapling. A future elevation, to which he would have never dared aspire, awaits him among these German tribes with whom he now unites himself.

Charlemagne bequeathed to his feeble successors only the wrecks of his power. In the ninth century disunion everywhere weakened the civil authority. Rome saw that this was the moment to exalt herself. When could the Church hope for a more favorable opportunity of becoming independent of the state, than when the crown which Charles had worn was broken, and its fragments lay scattered over his former empire?

Then appeared the False Decretals of Isidore. In this collection of the pretended decrees of the popes, the most ancient bishops, who were contemporary with Tacitus and Quintilian, were made to speak the barbarous Latin of the ninth century. The customs and constitutions of the Franks were seriously attributed to the Romans in the time of the emperors. Popes quoted the Bible in the Latin translation of Jerome, who had lived one, two or three centuries after them; and Victor, bishop of Rome, in the year 192, wrote to Theophilus, who was archbishop of Alexandria in 385. The impostor who had fabricated this collection endeavored to prove that all bishops derived their authority from the bishop of Rome, who held his own immediately from Christ. He not only recorded all the successive conquests of the pontiffs, but even carried them back to the earliest times. The popes were not ashamed to avail themselves of this contemptible imposture. As early as 865, Nicholas I drew from its stores of weapons by which to combat princes and bishops. This impudent invention was for ages the arsenal

of Rome.

Nevertheless, the vices and crimes of the pontiffs suspended for a time the effect of the decretals. The Papacy celebrated its admission to the table of kings by shameful orgies. She became intoxicated: her senses were lost in the midst of drunken revellings. It is about this period that tradition places upon the papal throne a woman named Joan, who had taken refuge in Rome with her lover, and whose sex was betrayed by the pangs of childbirth during a solemn procession. But let us not needlessly augment the shame of the pontifical court. Abandoned women at this time governed Rome; and that throne which pretended to rise above the majesty of kings was sunk deep in the dregs of vice. Theodora and Marozia installed and deposed at their pleasure the self-styled masters of the Church of Christ, and placed their lovers, sons, and grandsons in St. Peter’s chair. These scandals, which are but too well authenticated, may perhaps have given rise to the tradition of Pope Joan.

Rome became one wild theater of disorders, the possession of which was disputed by the most powerful families of Italy. The counts of Tuscany were generally victorious. In 1033, this house dared to place on the pontifical throne, under the name of Benedict IX, a youth brought up in debauchery. This boy of twelve years old continued, when pope, the same horrible and degrading vices. Another party chose Sylvester III in his stead; and Benedict, whose conscience was loaded with adulteries, and whose hands were stained with murder, at last sold the Papacy to a Roman ecclesiastic.

The emperors of Germany, filled with indignation at such enormities, purged Rome with the sword. The empire, asserting its paramount rights, drew the triple crown from the mire into which it had fallen, and saved the degraded papacy by giving it respectable men as its chiefs. Henry III deposed three popes in 1046, and his finger, decorated with the ring of the Roman patricians, pointed out the bishop to whom the keys of St. Peter should be confided. Four popes, all Germans,

and nominated by the emperor, succeeded. When the Roman pontiff died, the deputies of that church repaired to the imperial court, like the envoys of other dioceses, to solicit a new bishop. With joy the emperor beheld the popes reforming abuses, strengthening the Church, holding councils, installing and deposing prelates, in defiance of foreign monarchs: The Papacy by these pretensions did but exalt the power of the emperor, its lord paramount. But to allow of such practices was to expose his own authority to great danger. The power which the popes thus gradually recovered might be turned suddenly against the emperor himself.

When the reptile had gained strength, it might wound the bosom that had cherished it: and this result followed.

And now begins a new era for the papacy. It rises from its humiliation, and soon tramples the princes of the earth under foot. To exalt the Papacy is to exalt the Church, to advance religion, to ensure to the spirit the victory over the flesh, and to

God the conquest of the world. Such are its maxims: in these ambition finds its advantage, and fanaticism its excuse.

The whole of this new policy is personified in one man: Hildebrand.

This pope, who has been by turns indiscreetly exalted or unjustly traduced, is the personification of the Roman pontificate in all its strength and glory. He is one of those normal characters in history, which include within themselves a new order of things, similar to those presented in other spheres by Charlemagne, Luther, and Napoleon.

This monk, the son of a carpenter of Savoy, was brought up in a Roman convent, and had quitted Rome at the period when Henry III had there deposed three popes, and taken refuge in France in the austere convent of Cluny. In 1048, Bruno, bishop of Toul, having been nominated pope by the emperor at Worms, who was holding the German Diet in that city, assumed the pontifical habits, and took the name of Leo IX; but

Hildebrand, who had hastened thither, refused to recognize him, since it was (said he) from the secular power that he held the tiara. Leo, yielding to the irresistible power of a strong mind and of a deep conviction, immediately humbled himself, laid aside his sacerdotal ornaments, and clad in the garb of a pilgrim, set out barefoot for Rome along with Hildebrand (says an historian), in order to be there legitimately elected by the clergy and the Roman people. From this time Hildebrand was the soul of the Papacy, until he became pope himself. He had governed the Church under the name of several pontiffs, before he reigned in person as Gregory VII.

One grand idea had taken possession of this great genius. He desired to establish a visible theocracy, of which the pope, as vicar of Jesus Christ, should be the head. The recollection of the universal dominion of heathen Rome haunted his imagination and animated his zeal. He wished to restore to papal Rome all that imperial Rome had lost. “What Marius and Caesar,” said his flatterers, “could not effect by torrents of blood, thou hast

accomplished by a word.” Gregory VII was not directed by the spirit of the Lord. That spirit of truth, humility, and long-suffering was unknown to him. He sacrificed the truth whenever he judged it necessary to his policy. This he did particularly in the case of Berenger, archdeacon of Angers. But a spirit far superior to that of the generality of pontiffs — a deep conviction of the justice of his cause — undoubtedly animated him. He was bold, ambitious, persevering in his designs, and at the same time skillful and politic in the use of the means that would ensure success.

His first task was to organize the militia of the church. It was necessary to gain strength before attacking the empire. A council held at Rome removed the pastors from their families, and compelled them to become the devoted adherents of the hierarchy. The law of celibacy, planned and carried out by popes, who were themselves monks, changed the clergy into a sort of monastic order. Gregory VII claimed the same power over all the bishops and priests of Christendom, that an abbot of Cluny exercises in the order over which he

presides. The legates of Hildebrand, who compared themselves to the proconsuls of ancient Rome, traveled through the provinces, depriving the pastors of their legitimate wives; and, if necessary, the pope himself raised the populace against the married clergy.

But chief of all, Gregory designed emancipating Rome from its subjection to the empire. Never would he have dared conceive so bold a scheme, if the troubles that afflicted the minority of Henry IV, and the revolt of the German princes against that young emperor, had not favored its execution.

The pope was at this time one of the magnates of the empire. Making common cause with the other great vassals, he strengthened himself by the aristocratic interest, and then forbade all ecclesiastics, under pain of excommunication, to receive investiture from the emperor. He broke the ancient ties that connected the Churches and their pastors with the royal authority, but it was to bind them all to the pontifical throne. To this throne he

undertook to chain priests, kings, and people, and to make the pope a universal monarch. It was Rome alone that every priest should fear: it was in Rome alone that he should hope. The kingdoms and principalities of the earth are her domain. All kings were to tremble at the thunderbolts hurled by the Jupiter of modern Rome. Woe to him who resists! Subjects are released from their oaths of allegiance; the whole country is placed under an interdict; public worship ceases; the churches are closed; the bells are mute; the sacraments are no longer administered; and the malediction extends even to the dead, to whom the earth, at the command of a haughty pontiff, denies the repose of the tomb.

The pope, subordinate from the very beginning of his existence successively to the Roman, Frank, and German emperors, was now free, and he trod for the first time as their equal, if not their master. Yet Gregory VII was humbled in his turn: Rome was taken, and Hildebrand compelled to flee. He died at Salerno, exclaiming, “I have loved righteousness and hated iniquity, therefore do I die

in exile.” Who shall dare charge with hypocrisy these words uttered on the very brink of the grave?

The successors of Gregory, like soldiers arriving after a victory, threw themselves as conquerors on the enslaved Churches. Spain rescued from Islamism, Prussia reclaimed from idolatry, fell into the arms of the crowned priest. The Crusades, which were undertaken at his instigation, extended and confirmed his authority. The pious pilgrims, who in imagination had seen saints and angels leading their armed bands, — who, entering humble and barefoot within the walls of Jerusalem, burnt the Jews in their synagogue, and watered with the blood of thousands of Saracens the places where they came to trace the sacred footsteps of the Prince of Peace, — carried into the East the name of the pope, who had been forgotten there since he had exchanged the supremacy of the Greeks for that of the Franks.

In another quarter the power of the Church effected what the arms of the republic and of the empire had been unable to accomplish. The

Germans laid at the feet of a bishop those tributes which their ancestors had refused to the most powerful generals. Their princes, on succeeding to the imperial dignity, imagined they received a crown from the popes, but it was a yoke that was placed upon their necks. The kingdoms of Christendom, already subject to the spiritual authority of Rome, now became her serfs and tributaries.

Thus everything was changed in the Church.

It was at first a community of brethren, and now an absolute monarchy was established in its bosom. All Christians were priests of the living God, with humble pastors as their guides. But a haughty head is upraised in the midst of these pastors; a mysterious voice utters words full of pride; an iron hand compels all men, great and small, rich and poor, bond and free, to wear the badge of its power. The holy and primitive equality of souls before God is lost sight of. At the voice of one man Christendom is divided into two unequal parties: on the one side is a separate caste of

priests, daring to usurp the name of the Church, and claiming to be invested with peculiar privileges in the eyes of the Lord; and, on the other, servile flocks reduced to a blind and passive submission — a people gagged and fettered, and given over to a haughty caste. Every tribe, language, and nation of Christendom, submits to the dominion of this spiritual king, who has received power to conquer.

Chapter 2

Grace

But side by side with the principle that should pervade the history of Christianity, was found another that should preside over its doctrine. This was the great idea of Christianity — the idea of grace, of pardon, of amnesty, of the gift of eternal life. This idea supposed in man an alienation from God, and an inability of returning by any power of his own communion with that infinitely holy being. The opposition between the true and the false doctrine undoubtedly cannot be entirely summed up in the question of salvation by faith or works. Nevertheless it is its most striking characteristic. But further, salvation considered as coming from man, is the creative principle of every error and abuse. The excesses produced by this fundamental error led to the Reformation, and by the profession of the contrary principle it was carried out. This feature should therefore be very prominent in an introduction to the history of that reform.

Salvation by grace was the second characteristic which essentially distinguished the religion of God from all human systems. What had now become of it? Had the Church preserved, as a precious deposit, this great and primordial thought? Let us trace its history.

The inhabitants of Jerusalem, of Asia, of Greece, and of Rome, in the time of the first emperors, heard these glad tidings: “By grace are ye saved through faith: and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” At this proclamation of peace, at this joyful news, at this word of power, many guilty souls believed, and were drawn to Him who is the source of peace; and numerous Christian Churches were formed in the midst of the degenerate nations of that age.

But a great mistake was soon made as to the nature of this saving faith.

Faith, according to St. Paul, is the means by which the whole being of the believer — his understanding, heart, and will — enter into

possession of the salvation purchased for him by the incarnation and death of the Son of God. Jesus Christ is apprehended by faith and from that hour becomes all things to man and in man. He communicates a divine life to our human nature; and man thus renewed, and freed from the chains of sin and self, feels new affections and performs new works. Faith, says the theologian in order to express his ideas, is the subjective appropriation of the objective work of Christ. If faith be not an appropriation of salvation, it is nothing; all the Christian economy is thrown into confusion, the fountains of the new life are sealed, and Christianity is overturned from its foundations.

And this is what did happen. This practical view of faith was gradually forgotten. Soon it became, what it still is to many persons, a simple act of the understanding, a mere submission to a superior authority.

From this first error there necessarily proceeded a second. Faith being thus stripped of its practical character, it was impossible to say that it

alone had power to save: as works no longer were its fruits, they were of necessity placed side by side with it, and the doctrine that man is justified by faith and by works prevailed in the Church. In place of that Christian unity which comprises in a single principle justification and works, grace and the law, doctrine and duty, succeeded that melancholy duality which regards religion and morality as two entirely distinct things — that fatal error, which, by separating things that cannot live unless united, and by putting the soul on one side and the body on the other, is the cause of spiritual death. The words of the apostle, re-echoing across the interval of ages, are — “Having begun in the spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” Another great error contributed still further to unsettle the doctrine of grace: this was Pelagianism. Pelagius asserted that human nature is not fallen — that there is no hereditary corruption, and that man, having received the power to do good, has only to will in order to perform. If good works consist only in external acts, Pelagius is right. But if we look to the motives whence these outward acts proceed, we find everywhere in man’s

nature selfishness, forgetfulness of God, pollution, and impotency.

The Pelagian doctrine, expelled by Augustine from the Church when it had presented itself boldly, insinuated itself as demi-Pelagianism, and under the mask of the Augustine forms of expression. This error spread with astonishing rapidity throughout Christendom. The danger of the doctrine was particularly manifested in this, — that by placing goodness without, and not within, the heart, it set a great value on external actions, legal observances, and penitential words. The more these practices were observed, the more righteous man became: by them heaven was gained; and soon the extravagant idea prevailed that there are men who have advanced in holiness beyond what was required of them.

While Pelagianism corrupted the Christian doctrine, it strengthened the hierarchy. The hand that lowered grace, exalted the Church: for grace is God, the Church is man.

The more we feel the truth that all men are guilty before God, the more also shall we cling to Christ as the only source of Grace. How could we then place the Church in the same rank with Christ, since it is but an assembly of all those who are found in the same wretched state by nature?

But so soon as we attribute to man a peculiar holiness, a personal merit, everything is changed. The clergy and the monks are looked upon as the most natural channels through which to receive the grace of God. This was what happened often after the times of Pelagius. Salvation, taken from the hands of God, fell into those of the priests, who set themselves in the place of our Lord. Souls thirsting for pardon were no more to look to heaven, but to the Church, and above all to its pretended head. To those blinded souls the Roman pontiff was God. Hence the greatness of the popes — hence unutterable abuses. The evil spread still further. When Pelagianism laid down the doctrine that man could attain a state of perfect sanctification, it affirmed also that the merits of saints and martyrs might be applied to the Church. A peculiar power

was attributed to their intercession. Prayers were made to them; their aid was invoked in all the sorrows of life; and a read idolatry thus supplanted the adoration of the living and true God.

At the same time, Pelagianism multiplied rites and ceremonies. Man, imagining that he could and that he ought by good works to render himself deserving of grace, saw no fitter means of meriting it than acts of external worship. The ceremonial law became infinitely complicated, and was soon put on a level, to say the least, with the moral law. Thus were the consciences of Christians burdened anew with a yoke that had been declared insupportable in the times of the apostles. But it was especially by the system of penance, which flowed immediately from Pelagianism, that Christianity was perverted. At first, penance had consisted in certain public expressions of repentance, required by the Church from those who had been excluded on account of scandals, and who desired to be received again into its bosom.

By degrees penance was extended to every sin,

even to the most secret, and was considered as a sort of punishment to which it was necessary to submit, in order to obtain the forgiveness of God through the priest’s absolution.

Ecclesiastical penance was thus confounded with Christian repentance, without which there can be neither justification nor sanctification.

Instead of looking to Christ for pardon through faith alone, it was sought for principally in the Church through penitential works.

Great importance was soon attached to external marks of repentance — to tears, fasting, and mortification of the flesh; and the inward regeneration of the heart, which alone constitutes a real conversion, was forgotten.

As confession and penance are easier than the extirpation of sin and the abandonment of vice, many ceased contending against the lusts of the flesh, and preferred gratifying them at the expense of a few mortifications.

The penitential works, thus substituted for the salvation of God, were multiplied in the Church from Tertullian down to the thirteenth century.

Men were required to fast, to go barefoot, to wear no linen, etc.; to quit their homes and their native land for distant countries; or to renounce the world and embrace a monastic life.

In the eleventh century voluntary flagellations were superadded to these practices: somewhat later they became quite a mania in Italy, which was then in a very disturbed state. Nobles and peasants, old and young, even children of five years of age, whose only covering was a cloth tied round the middle, went in pairs, by hundreds, thousands, and tens of thousands, through the towns and villages, visiting the churches in the depth of winter. Armed with scourges, they flogged each other without pity, and the streets resounded with cries and groans that drew tears from all who heard them.

Still, long before the disease had reached such a

height, the priest-ridden world had sighed for deliverance. The priests themselves had found out, that if they did not apply a remedy their usurped power would slip from their hands. They accordingly invented that system of barter celebrated under the title of Indulgences. They said to their penitents: “You cannot accomplish the tasks imposed on you. Well! We, the priests of God and your pastors, will take this heavy burden upon ourselves. For a seven weeks’ fast,” said Regino, abbot of Prum, “you shall pay twenty pence, if you are rich; ten, if less wealthy; and three pence if you are poor; and so on for other matters.” Courageous men raised their voices against this traffic, but in vain!

The pope soon discovered what advantages could be derived from those indulgences. Alexander Hales, the irrefragable doctor, invented in the thirteenth century a doctrine well calculated to secure these vast revenues to the Papacy. A bull of Clement VII declared it an article of faith. Jesus Christ, it was said, had done much more than was necessary to reconcile God to man. One single drop

of his blood would have been sufficient. But he shed it copiously, in order to form a treasure for his Church that eternity can never exhaust. The supererogatory merits of the saints, the reward of the good works they had done beyond their obligation, have still further augmented this treasure. Its keeping and management were confided to Christ's vicar upon earth. He applies to each sinner, for the sins committed after baptism, these merits of Jesus Christ and of the saints, according to the measure and the quantity his sins require. Who would venture to attack a custom of such holy origin!

This inconceivable traffic was soon extended and complicated. The philosophers of Alexandria had spoken of a fire in which men were to be purified. Many ancient doctors had adopted this notion; and Rome declared this philosophical opinion a tenet of the Church. The pope by a bull annexed Purgatory to his domain. In that place, he declared, men would have to expiate the sins that could not be expiated here on earth; but that indulgences would liberate their souls from that

intermediate state in which their sins would detain them. Thomas Aquinas set forth this doctrine in his famous Summa Theologiae. No means were spared to fill the mind with terror. The priests depicted in horrible colors the torments inflicted by this purifying fire on all who became its prey. In many Roman-catholic countries we may still see paintings exhibited in the churches and public places, wherein poor souls, from the midst of glowing flames, invoke with anguish some alleviation of their pain. Who could refuse the ransom which, falling into the treasury of Rome, would redeem the soul from such torments?

Somewhat later, in order to reduce this traffic to a system, they invented (probably under John II) the celebrated and scandalous Tariff of Indulgences, which has gone through more than forty editions. The least delicate ears would be offended by an enumeration of all the horrors it contains. Incest, if not detected, was to cost five groats; and six, if it was known. There was a stated price for murder, infanticide, adultery, perjury, burglary, etc. “O disgrace of Rome!” exclaims

Claude d’Espence, a Roman divine: and we may add, O disgrace of human nature! for we can utter no reproach against Rome that does not recoil on man himself. Rome is human nature exalted in some of its worst propensities. We say this that we may speak the truth; we say it also, that we may be just.

Boniface VIII, the most daring and ambitious pontiff after Gregory VII, was enabled to effect still more than his predecessors.

In the year 1300, he published a bull, in which he declared to the Church that every hundred years all who made a pilgrimage to Rome should receive a plenary indulgence. From all parts, from Italy, Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica, France, Spain, Germany, and Hungary, people flocked in crowds.

Old men of sixty and seventy undertook the journey, and in one month two hundred thousand pilgrims visited Rome. All these strangers brought rich offerings; and the pope and the Romans saw their coffers replenished.

Roman avarice soon fixed each Jubilee at fifty, then at thirty-three, and lastly at twenty-five years' interval. Then, for the greater convenience of purchasers, and the greater profit of the sellers, both the jubilee and its indulgences were transported from Rome to every market-place in Christendom. It was no longer necessary to leave one's home. What others had gone in search of beyond the Alps, each man could now buy at his own door.

The evil could not become greater.

Then the Reformer appeared.

We have seen what had become of the principle that was destined to govern the history of Christianity; we have seen also what became of that which should have pervaded its doctrines: both were lost.

To set up a mediatorial caste between God and man — to obtain by works, by penance, and by

money the salvation which is the free gift of God — such is Popery.

To open to all, through Jesus Christ, without any human mediator, without that power which calls itself the Church, free access to the great boon of eternal life which God offers to man — such is Christianity and the Reformation.

Popery is a lofty barrier erected by the labor of ages between God and man. If any one desires to scale it, he must pay or he must suffer; and even then he will not surmount it.

The Reformation is the power that has overthrown this barrier, that has restored Christ to man, and has thus opened a level path by which he may reach his Creator.

Popery interposes the Church between God and man.

Primitive Christianity and the Reformation bring God and man face to face.

Popery separates them — the Gospel unites them.

After having thus traced the history of the decline and fall of the two great principles that were to distinguish the religion of “God from all human systems, let us see what were some of the consequences of this immense transformation.

But first let us pay due honor to the Church of the Middle Ages, which succeeded that of the apostles and of the fathers, and which preceded that of the reformers. The Church was still the Church, although fallen, and daily more and more enslaved: that is to say, she was always the greatest friend of man. Her hands, though bound, could still be raised to bless.

Eminent servants of Jesus Christ, who were true Protestants as regards the essential doctrines of Christianity, diffused a cheering light during the dark ages; and in the humblest convent, in the remotest parish, might be found poor monks and

poor priests to alleviate great sufferings. The Catholic church was not the Papacy. The latter was the oppressor, the former the oppressed. The Reformation, which declared war against the one, came to deliver the other. And it must be confessed that the Papacy itself became at times in the hands of God, who brings good out of evil, a necessary counterpoise to the power and ambition of princes.

Chapter 3

Religion

Let us now see what was the state of the Church previous to the Reformation.

The nations of Christendom no longer looked to a holy and living God for the free gift of eternal life. To obtain it, they were obliged to have recourse to all the means that a superstitious, fearful, and alarmed imagination could devise. Heaven was filled with saints and mediators, whose duty it was to solicit this mercy. Earth was filled with pious works, sacrifices, observances, and ceremonies, by which it was to be obtained. Here is a picture of the religion of this period transmitted to us by one who was long a monk, and afterwards a fellow-laborer of Luther's — by Myconius: — "The sufferings and merits of Christ were looked upon as an idle tale, or as the fictions of Homer. There was no thought of faith by which we become partakers of the Savior's righteousness and of the heritage of eternal life. Christ was

looked upon as a severe judge, prepared to condemn all who should not have recourse to the intercession of the saints, or to the papal indulgences. Other intercessors appeared in his place: — first the Virgin Mary, like the Diana of paganism, and then the saints, whose numbers were continually augmented by the popes. These mediators granted their intercession only to such applicants as had deserved well of the orders founded by them. For this it was necessary to do, not what God had commanded in his Word, but to perform a number of works invented by monks and priests, and which brought money to the treasury. These works were Ave-Marias, the prayers of Saint Ursula and of Saint Bridget: they must chant and cry night and day. There were as many resorts for pilgrims as there were mountains, forests, and valleys. But these penances might be compounded for with money. The people, therefore, brought to the convents and to the priests money and every thing that had any value — fowls, ducks, geese, eggs, wax, straw, butter, and cheese.

Then the hymns resounded, the bells rang,

incense filled the sanctuary, sacrifices were offered up, the larders overflowed, the glasses went round, and masses terminated and concealed these pious orgies. The bishops no longer preached, but they consecrated priests, bells, monks, churches, chapels, images, books, and cemeteries; and all this brought in a large revenue. Bones, arms, and feet were preserved in gold and silver boxes; they were given out during mass for the faithful to kiss, and this too was a source of great profit.

“All these people maintained that the pope, ‘sitting as God in the temple of God,’ could not err, and they would not suffer any contradiction.” In the church of All Saints at Wittenberg was shown a fragment of Noah’s ark, some soot from the furnace of the Three Children, a Piece of wood from the cradle of Jesus Christ, some hair from the beard of St.

Christopher, and nineteen thousand other relics of greater or less value. At Schaffhausen was exhibited the breath of St. Joseph that Nicodemus had received in his glove. In Wurtemberg you

might meet a seller of indulgences, vending his merchandise, his head adorned with a large feather plucked from the wing of St. Michael. But it was not necessary to travel far in search of these precious treasures. Men who farmed the relics traversed the whole country, hawking them about the rural districts (as has since been the case with the Holy Scriptures), and carrying them to the houses of the faithful, to spare them the trouble and expense of a pilgrimage. They were exhibited with pomp in the churches. These wandering hawkers paid a stipulated sum to the owners of the relics, — a percentage on their profits. The kingdom of heaven had disappeared, and in its place a market of abominations had been opened upon earth.

Thus a spirit of profanity had invaded religion; and the holiest recollections of the Church, the seasons which more particularly summoned the faithful to holy meditation and love, were disgraced by buffoonery and heathenish profanation. The “Revels of Easter” held a distinguished place in the records of the Church. As the festival of the resurrection of Christ ought to

be celebrated with joy, the preachers studied in their sermons everything that might raise a laugh among their hearers. One imitated the note of the cuckoo; another hissed like a goose.

One dragged to the altar a layman robed in a monk’s frock; a second related the most indecent stories; and a third recounted the tricks of St. Peter, and among others, how in a tavern he had cheated his host by not paying his reckoning. The lower clergy took advantage of this opportunity to ridicule their superiors. The churches were converted into a mere stage for mountebanks, and the priests into buffoons.

If such was the state of religion, what must have been the state of morals?

Undoubtedly the corruption was not at that time universal. Justice requires that this should not be forgotten. The Reformation elicited numerous examples of piety, righteousness, and strength of mind. The spontaneous action of God’s power was the cause; but how can we deny that he had

beforehand deposited the seeds of this new life in the bosom of the Church? If in our days we should bring together all the immoralities, all the turpitudes committed in a single country, the mass of corruption would doubtless shock us still. Nevertheless, the evil at this period wore a character and universality that it has not borne subsequently. And, above all, the mystery of iniquity desolated the holy places, as it has not been permitted to do since the days of the Reformation.

Morality had declined with the decline of faith. The tidings of the gift of eternal life is the power of God to regenerate man. Take away the salvation which God has given, and you take away sanctification and good works.

And this result followed.

The doctrine and the sale of indulgences were powerful incentives to evil among an ignorant people. True, according to the Church, indulgences could benefit those only who promised to amend

their lives, and who kept their word. But what could be expected from a tenet invented solely with a view to the profit that might be derived from it? The venders of indulgences were naturally tempted, for the better sale of their merchandise, to present their wares to the people in the most attractive and seducing aspect. The learned themselves did not fully understand the doctrine. All that the multitude saw in them was, that they permitted men to sin; and the merchants were not over eager to dissipate an error so favorable to their sale.

What disorders and crimes were committed in these dark ages, when impunity was to be purchased by money! What had man to fear, when a small contribution towards building a church secured him from the fear of punishment in the world to come? What hope could there be of revival when all communication between God and man was cut off, and man, an alien from God, who is the spirit and the life, moved only in a round of paltry ceremonies and sensual observances, in an atmosphere of death!

The priests were the first who yielded to this corrupting influence. By desiring to exalt themselves they became abased. They had aimed at robbing God of a ray of his glory, and placing it in their own bosoms; but their attempt had proved vain, and they had only hidden there a leaven of corruption stolen from the power of evil. The history of the age swarms with scandals. In many places, the people were delighted at seeing a priest keep a mistress, that the married women might be safe from his seductions.

What humiliating scenes did the house of a pastor in those days present! The wretched man supported the woman and the children she had borne him with the tithes and offerings. His conscience was troubled: he blushed in the presence of the people, before his domestics, and before God. The mother, fearing to come to want if the priest should die, made provision against it beforehand, and robbed her own house. Her honor was lost. Her children were ever a living accusation against her. Despised by all, they plunged into

quarrels and debauchery. Such was the family of the priest!.....These were frightful scenes, by which the people knew how to profit. The rural districts were the scene of numerous disorders. The abodes of the clergy were often dens of corruption. Corneille Adrian at Bruges, the abbot Trinkler at Cappel, imitated the manners of the East, and had their harems. Priests, consorting with dissolute characters, frequented the taverns, played at dice, and crowned their orgies with quarrels and blasphemy. The council of Schaffhausen forbade the priests to dance in public, except at marriages, and to carry more than one kind of arms: they decreed also that all who were found in houses of ill fame should be unfrocked. In the archbishopric of Mentz, they scaled the walls by night, and created all kinds of disorder and confusion in the inns and taverns, and broke the doors and locks. In many places the priest paid the bishop a regular tax for the woman with whom he lived, and for each child he had by her. A German bishop said publicly one day, at a great entertainment, that in one year eleven thousand priests had presented themselves before him for that purpose. It is Erasmus who

relates this. If we go higher in the hierarchial order, we find the corruption not less great. The dignitaries of the Church preferred the tumult of camps to the hymns of the altar. To be able, lance in hand, to reduce his neighbors to obedience was one of the chief qualifications of a bishop. Baldwin, archbishop of Treves, was continually at war with his neighbors and his vassals: he demolished their castles, built strongholds, and thought of nothing but the extension of his territory.

A certain bishop of Eichstadt, when administering justice, wore a coat of mail under his robes, and held a large sword in his hand. He used to say he was not afraid of five Bavarians, provided they did but attack him in fair fight. Everywhere the bishops were continually at war with their towns.

The citizens demanded liberty, the bishops required implicit obedience. If the latter gained the victory, they punished the revolters by sacrificing numerous victims to their vengeance; but the flame

of insurrection burst out again, at the very moment when it was thought to be extinguished.

And what a spectacle was presented by the pontifical throne in the times immediately preceding the Reformation! Rome, it must be acknowledged, had seldom witnessed so much infamy.

Rodrigo Borgia, after having lived with a Roman lady, had continued the same illicit connection with one of her daughters, named Rosa Vanozza, by whom he had five children. He was a cardinal and archbishop, living at Rome with Vanozza and other women, visiting the churches and the hospitals, when the death of Innocent VIII created a vacancy in the pontifical chair. He succeeded in obtaining it by bribing each cardinal at a stipulated price. Four mules laden with silver publicly entered the palace of Sforza, one of the most influential of the cardinals. Borgia became pope under the name of Alexander VI, and rejoiced in thus attaining the summit of earthly felicity.

On the day of his coronation, his son Caesar, a youth of Ferocious and dissolute manners, was created archbishop of Valencia and bishop of Pampeluna. He next celebrated in the Vatican the marriage of his daughter Lucretia, by festivities at which his mistress, Julia Bella, was present, and which were enlivened by licentious plays and songs. “All the clergy,” says an historian, “kept mistresses, and all the convents of the capital were houses of ill fame.” Caesar Borgia espoused the cause of the Guelfs; and when by their assistance he had destroyed the Ghibellines, he turned upon the Guelfs and crushed them in their turn. But he desired to share alone in all these spoils. In 1497, Alexander gave the duchy of Benevento to his eldest son. The duke suddenly disappeared. A faggotdealer, on the banks of the Tiber, one George Schiavoni, had seen a dead body thrown into the stream during the night; but he said nothing of it, as being a common occurrence. The body of the duke was found. His brother Caesar had been the instigator of his death. This was not enough. His brother-inlaw stood in his way: one day Caesar caused him to be stabbed on the very stairs of the

pontifical palace. He was carried bleeding to his own apartments. His wife and sister did not leave him; and fearful that Caesar would employ poison, they prepared his meals with their own hands.

Alexander set a guard on the doors; but Caesar ridiculed these precautions, and remarked, as the pope was about to pay a visit to his son-in-law, “What is not done at dinner will be done at supper.” Accordingly, one day he gained admittance to the chamber of the convalescent, turned out the wife and sister, and calling in his executioner Michilotto, the only man in whom he placed any confidence, ordered his brother-in-law to be strangled before his eyes. Alexander had a favorite, Perotto, whose influence also offended the young duke. He rushed upon him: Perotto took refuge under the pontifical mantle, and clasped the pope in his arms. Caesar stabbed him, and the blood of his victim spirted in the face of the pontiff. “The pope,” adds a contemporary and eye-witness of these scenes, “loves the duke his son, and lives in great fear of him.” Caesar was the handsomest and strongest man of his age. Six wild

bulls fell easily beneath his blows in single combat. Every morning some new victim was found, who had been assassinated during the night in the Roman streets. Poison carried off those whom the dagger could not reach. No one dared move or breathe in Rome, for fear that his turn should come next.

Caesar Borgia was the hero of crime. That spot of earth in which iniquity had attained such a height was the throne of the pontiffs. When man gives himself up to the powers of evil, the higher he claims to be exalted before God, the lower he sinks into the abyss of hell. The dissolute entertainments given by the pope, his son Caesar, and his daughter Lucretia, in the pontifical palace, cannot be described or even thought of without shuddering. The impure groves of antiquity saw nothing like them.

Historians have accused Alexander and Lucretia of incest; but this charge does not appear sufficiently established. The pope had prepared poison in a box of sweetmeats that was to be

served up after a sumptuous repast: the cardinal for whom it was intended being forewarned, gained over the attendant, and the poisoned box was set before Alexander. He ate of it and died. “The whole city ran together, and could not satiate their eyes with gazing on this dead viper.” Such was the man who filled the papal chair at the beginning of the century in which the Reformation burst forth.

Thus had the clergy brought not only themselves but religion into disrepute. Well might a powerful voice exclaim: “The ecclesiastical order is opposed to God and to his glory. The people know it well; and this is but too plainly shown by the many songs, proverbs, and jokes against the priests, that are current among the commonalty, and all those caricatures of monks and priests on every wall, and even on the playing-cards. Every one feels a loathing on seeing or hearing a priest in the distance.” It is Luther who speaks thus. The evil had spread through all ranks: “a strong delusion” had been sent among men; the corruption of manners corresponded with the corruption of faith. A mystery of iniquity oppressed the enslaved

Church of Christ.

Another consequence necessarily flowed from the neglect into which the fundamental doctrine of the gospel had fallen. Ignorance of the understanding accompanied the corruption of the heart. The priests having taken into their hands the distribution of the salvation that belongs only to God, had secured a sufficient title to the respect of the people. What need had they to study sacred learning? It was no longer a question of explaining the Scriptures, but of granting letters of indulgence; and for this ministry it was not necessary to have acquired much learning.

In country places, they chose for preachers, says Wimpheling, “miserable wretches whom they had previously raised from beggary, and who had been cooks, musicians, huntsmen, stable-boys, and even worse.” The superior clergy themselves were often sunk in great ignorance. A bishop of Dunfeld congratulated himself on having never learnt either Greek or Hebrew. The monks asserted that all heresies arose from those two languages, and

particularly from the Greek. “The New Testament,” said one of them, “is a book full of serpents and thorns. Greek,” continued he, “is a new and recently invented language, and we must be upon our guard against it. As for Hebrew, my dear brethren, it is certain that all who learn it, immediately become Jews.” Heresbach, a friend of Erasmus, and a respectable author, reports these expressions. Thomas Linacer, a learned and celebrated ecclesiastic, had never read the New Testament. In his latter days (in 1524), he called for a copy, but quickly threw it away from him with an oath, because on opening it his eyes had glanced upon these words: “But I say unto you, Swear not at all.” Now he was a great swearer. “Either this is not the Gospel,” said he, “or else we are not Christians.” Even the faculty of theology at Paris scrupled not to declare to the parliament: “Religion is ruined, if you permit the study of Greek and Hebrew.” If any learning was found here and there among the clergy, it was not in sacred literature. The Ciceronians of Italy affected a great contempt for the Bible on account of its style. Pretended priests of the Church of Christ

translated the writings of holy men, inspired by the Spirit of God, in the style of Virgil and of Horace, to accommodate their language to the ears of good society. Cardinal Bembo, instead of the Holy Ghost, used to write the breath of the heavenly zephyr; for the expression to forgive sins — to bend the mancs and the sovereign gods; and for Christ, the Son of God — Minerva sprung from the head of Jupiter. Finding one day the worthy Sadolet engaged in translating the Epistle to the Romans, he said to him: “Leave these childish matters: such fooleries do not become a sensible man.” These were some of the consequences of the system that then oppressed Christendom. This picture undoubtedly demonstrates the corruption of the Church, and the necessity for a reformation. Such was our design in writing this sketch. The vital doctrines of Christianity had almost entirely disappeared, and with them the life and light that constitute the essence of the religion of God. The material strength of the Church was gone. It lay an exhausted, enfeebled, and almost lifeless body, extended over that part of the world which the Roman empire had occupied.

Chapter 4

Imperishable Nature of Christianity

The evils which thus afflicted Christendom; superstition, unbelief, ignorance, vain speculation, and corruption of morals — the natural fruits of the hearts of man — were not new upon the earth. Often they had appeared in the history of nations. They had invaded, especially in the East, the different religious systems that had seen their day of glory.

Those enervated systems had sunk under these evils, had fallen under their attack, and not one of them had ever risen again.

Was Christianity now to undergo the same fate? Would it be lost like these old national religions? Would the blow that had caused their death be sufficient to deprive it of life? Could nothing save it? Will these hostile powers that

overwhelm it, and which have already overthrown so many various systems of worship, be able to seat themselves with out resistance on the ruins of the Church of Jesus Christ?

No! There is in Christianity what none of these national systems possessed. It does not, like them, present certain general ideas mingled with tradition and fable, destined to fall sooner or later under the assault of reason: it contains a pure and undefiled truth, founded on facts capable of bearing the examination of every upright and enlightened mind.

Christianity does not propose merely to excite in man certain vague religious feelings, whose charm once lost can never be recovered: its object is to satisfy, and it does really satisfy, all the religious wants of human nature, whatever may be the degree of development which it has attained.

It is not the work of man, whose labors pass away and are forgotten; it is the work of God, who upholds what he has created; and it has the promise

of its Divine Head as the pledge of its duration.

It is impossible for human nature ever to rise superior to Christianity. And if for a time man thought he could do without it, it soon appeared to him with fresh youth and a new life, as the only remedy for souls. The degenerate nations then returned with new ardor toward those ancient, simple, and powerful truths, which in the hour of their infatuation they had despised.

In fact, Christianity manifested in the sixteenth century the same regenerative power that it had exercised at first. After fifteen centuries the same truths produced the same effects. In the day of the Reformation, as in the time of Peter and Paul, the Gospel overthrew mighty obstacles with irresistible force. Its sovereign power displayed its efficacy from north to south among nations the most dissimilar in manners, character, and intellectual development. Then as in the times of Stephen and James, it kindled the fire of enthusiasm and devotedness in the lifeless nations, and elevated them to the height of martyrdom.

How was this revival of the church accomplished? We observe here two laws by which God governs the Church in all times.

First he prepares slowly and from afar that which he designs to accomplish. He has ages in which to work.

Then, when the time is come, he effects the greatest results by the smallest means. It is thus he acts in nature and in history. When he wishes to produce a majestic tree, he deposits a small seed in the bosom of the earth; when he wishes to renovate his Church, he employs the lowliest instruments to accomplish what emperors and learned and distinguished men in the Church could not effect. We shall soon go in search of, and we shall discover, that small seed which a Divine hand placed in the earth in the days of the Reformation. But we must here distinguish and recognize the different means by which God prepared the way for this great revolution.

At the period when the reformation was about to burst forth, Rome appeared in peace and security. One might have said that nothing could ever disturb her in her triumph: great victories had been achieved by her.

The general councils — those upper and lower chambers of Catholicism — had been subdued. The Waldenses and the Hussites had been crushed. No university, except perhaps that of Paris, which sometimes raised its voice at the signal of its kings, doubted the infallibility of the oracles of Rome.

Every one seemed to have taken his own share of its power. The higher orders of the clergy preferred giving to a distant chief the tithe of their revenues, and tranquilly to consume the remainder, to risking all for an independence that would cost them dear and would bring them little profit.

The inferior clergy, attracted by the prospect of brilliant stations, which their ambition painted and discovered in the distance, willingly purchased by a little slavery the faltering hopes they cherished.

Besides, they were everywhere so oppressed by the chiefs of the hierarchy, that they could scarcely stir under their powerful hands, and much less raise themselves and make head against them. The people bent the knee before the Roman altar; and even kings themselves, who began in secret to despise the bishop of Rome, would not have dared lay hands upon his power for fear of the imputation of sacrilege.

But if external position appeared to have subsided, or even to have entirely ceased, when the Reformation broke out, its internal strength had increased. If we take a nearer view of the edifice, we discover more than one symptom that foreboded its destruction. The cessation of the general councils had scattered their principles throughout the Church, and carried disunion into the camp of their opponents. The defenders of the hierarchy were divided into two parties: those who maintained the system of absolute papal dominion, according to the maxims of Hildebrand; and those who desired a constitutional papal government, offering securities and liberty to the several

Churches.

And more than this, in both parties faith in the infallibility of the Roman bishop had been rudely shaken. If no voice was raised to attack it, it was because every one felt anxious rather to preserve the little faith he still possessed. They dreaded the slightest shock, lest it should overthrow the whole edifice. Christendom held its breath; but it was to prevent a calamity in which it feared to perish. From the moment that man trembles to abandon a long-worshipped persuasion, he possesses it no more. And he will not much longer keep up the appearance that he wishes to maintain.

The Reformation had been gradually prepared by God’s providence in three different spheres — the political, the ecclesiastical, and the literary.

Princes and their subjects, Christians and divines, the learned and the wise, contributed to bring about this revolution of the sixteenth century. Let us pass in review this triple classification, finishing with that of literature, which was perhaps

the most powerful in the times immediately preceding the reform.

And, firstly, Rome had lost much of her ancient credit in the eyes of nations and of kings. Of this the Church itself was the primary cause. The errors and superstitions which she had introduced into Christianity were not, properly speaking, what had inflicted the mortal wound. The Christian world must have been raised above the clergy in intellectual and religious development, to have been able to judge of it in this point of view. But there was an order of things within the comprehension of the laity, and by this the Church was judged. It had become altogether earthly.

That sacerdotal dominion which lorded over the nations, and which could not exist except by the delusion of its subjects, and by the halo that encircled it, had forgotten its nature, left heaven and its spheres of light and glory to mingle in the vulgar interests of citizens and princes. The priests, born to be the representatives of the Spirit, had bartered it away for the flesh. They had abandoned

the treasures of science and the spiritual power of the Word, for the brute force and false glory of the age.

This happened naturally enough. It was in truth the spiritual order which the Church had at first undertaken to defend. But to protect it against the resistance and attacks of the people, she had recourse to earthly means, to vulgar arms, which a false policy had induced her to take up. When once the Church had begun to handle such weapons, her spirituality was at an end. Her arm could not become temporal and her heart not become temporal also. Erelong was seen apparently the reverse of what had been at first. After resolving to employ earth to defend heaven, she made use of heaven to defend the earth. Theocratic forms became in her hands the means of accomplishing worldly enterprises. The offerings which the people laid at the feet of the sovereign pontiff of Christendom were employed in maintaining the splendor of his court and in paying his armies. His spiritual power served as steps by which to place the kings and nations of the earth under his feet.

The charm ceased, and the power of the Church was lost, so soon as the men of those days could say, She is become as one of us.

The great were the first to scrutinize the titles of this imaginary power.

This very examination might perhaps have been sufficient for the overthrow of Rome. But fortunately for her the education of the princes was everywhere in the hands of her adepts, who inspired their august pupils with sentiments of veneration towards the Roman pontiff. The rulers of the people grew up in the sanctuary of the Church. Princes of ordinary capacity never entirely got beyond it: many longed only to return to it at the hour of death. They preferred dying in a friar’s cowl to dying beneath a crown.

Italy — that European apple of discord — contributed perhaps more than anything else to open the eyes of kings. They had to contract alliances with the pope, which had reference to the temporal prince of the States of the Church, and

not to the bishop of bishops. Kings were astonished at seeing the popes ready to sacrifice the rights belonging to the pontiff, in order that they might preserve some advantage to the prince. They perceived that these pretended organs of the truth had recourse to all the paltry wiles of policy, — to deceit, dissimulation, and perjury. Then fell off the bandage which education had bound over the eyes of princes.

Then the artful Ferdinand of Aragon played stratagem against stratagem.

Then the impetuous Louis XII had a medal struck, with the inscription, Perdam Babylonis Nomen. And the good Maximilian of Austria, grieved at hearing of the treachery of Leo X, said openly: “This pope also, in my opinion, is a scoundrel. Now may I say, that never in my life has any pope kept his faith or his word with me.....I hope, God willing, this will be the last of them.” Kings and people then began to feel impatient under the heavy burden the popes had laid upon them. They demanded that Rome should relieve

them from tithes, tributes, and annates, which exhausted their resources.

Already had France opposed Rome with the Pragmatic Sanction, and the chiefs of the empire claimed the like immunity. the emperor was present in person at the council of Pisa in 1411, and even for a time entertained the idea of securing the Papacy to himself. But of all these leaders, none was so useful to the Reformation as he in whose states it was destined to commence.

Frederick of Saxony, surnamed the Wise, was at that time the most powerful of all the Electors. Coming to the government of the hereditary states of his family in 1487, he had received the electoral dignity from the emperor; and in 1493, having gone on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, he was there made a knight of the Holy Sepulchre. the influence he exercised, his wealth and liberality, raised him above his equals. God chose him to serve as a tree under whose shelter the seeds of truth might put forth their first shoots, without being uprooted by the tempests around them. No one was better

adapted for this noble ministry. Frederick possessed the esteem of all, and enjoyed the full confidence of the emperor. He even supplied his place when Maximilian was absent from Germany. His wisdom did not consist in the skillful exercise of a crafty policy, but in an enlightened, far-seeing prudence; the first principle of which was never from interested motives to infringe the laws of honor and of religion.

At the same time, he felt the power of God's word in his heart. One day, when the vicar-general Staupitz was with him, the conversation turned on those who were in the habit of delivering empty declamations from the pulpit. "All discourses," said the elector, "that are filled only with subtleties and human traditions, are wonderfully cold and unimpressive; since no subtlety can be advanced, that another sublety cannot overthrow.

The Holy Scriptures alone are clothed with such power and majesty, that, destroying all our learned reasoning-machines, they press us close, and compel us to say, Never man spake like this

man.” Staupitz having expressed himself entirely of that opinion, the elector shook him cordially by the hand and said: “Promise me that you will always think the same.” Frederick was precisely the prince required at the beginning of the Reformation. Too much weakness on the part of the friends of this work would have allowed of its being crushed. Too much precipitation would have made the storm burst forth sooner, which from its very commencement began to gather in secret against it. Frederick was moderate but firm. He possessed that virtue which God requires at all times in those who love his ways: he waited for God. He put in practice the wise counsel of Gamaliel: “If this work be of men, it will come to nought; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it.” “Things are come to such a pass,” said this prince to Spengler of Nuremberg, one of the most enlightened men of his day, “that man can do no more; God alone must act. For this reason we place in his powerful hands these mighty works that are too difficult for us.” Providence claims our admiration in the choice it made of such a ruler to protect its rising work.

Chapter 5

Popular Feeling

We have seen God’s preparations among the princes for the work he was about to accomplish: let us now consider what they were among their subject. It would have been of less importance for the chiefs to have been ready, if the nations themselves had not been so. The discoveries made by the kings had acted gradually upon the people. The wisest of them began to grow accustomed to the idea that the bishop of Rome was a mere man, and sometimes even a very bad man. The people in general began to suspect that he was not much holier than their own bishops, whose reputation was very equivocal. The licentiousness of the popes excited the indignation of Christendom, and a hatred of the Roman name was deeply seated in the hearts of nations. Numerous causes at the same time facilitated the emancipation of the various countries of the West. Let us cast a glance over their condition at this period.

The Empire was a confederation of different states, having an emperor at their head, and each possessing sovereignty within its own territories. The Imperial Diet, composed of all the princes or sovereign states, exercised the legislative power for all the Germanic body. It was the emperor’s duty to ratify the laws, decrees, and recesses of this assembly, and he had the charge of applying them and putting them into execution. The seven most powerful princes, under the title of Electors, had the privilege of conferring the imperial crown.

The north of Germany, inhabited principally by the ancient Saxon race, had acquired the greatest portion of liberty. The emperor, whose hereditary possessions were continually harassed by the Turks, was compelled to keep on good terms with these princes and their courageous subjects, who were at that time necessary to him. Several free cities in the north, west, and south of the empire, had by their commerce, manufactures, and industry, attained a high degree of prosperity, and consequently of independence. The powerful house of Austria, which wore the imperial crown, held

most of the states of southern Germany in its power, and narrowly watched every movement. It was preparing to extend its dominion over the whole of the empire, and even beyond it, when the Reformation raised a powerful barrier against its encroachments, and saved the independence of Europe.

As Judea, when Christianity first appeared, was in the center of the old world, so Germany was the center of Christendom. It touched, at the same time, in the Low Countries, England, France, Switzerland, Italy, Hungary, Bohemia, Poland, Denmark, and all the North. It was in the very heart of Europe that this principle of life was destined to be developed, and its pulsations were to circulate through the arteries of this great body the generous blood that was appointed to vivify all its members.

The particular form of constitution which the empire had received, conformable with the dispensations of Providence, favored the propagation of new ideas. If Germany had been a monarchy strictly so called, like France or England,

the arbitrary will of the sovereign might have sufficed to check for a while the progress of the Gospel. But it was a confederation. The truth, opposed in one state, might be received with favor in another.

The internal peace that Maximilian had secured to the empire was no less favorable to the Reformation. For a long time the numerous members of the Germanic body seemed to have taken a pleasure in tearing each other to pieces. Nothing had been seen but confusion, discord, and wars incessantly renewed. Neighbors were against neighbors, town against town, nobles against nobles. Maximilian had laid a firm foundation of public order in the Imperial Chamber, an institution appointed to decide all differences between the various states. The German nations, after so many disorders and anxieties, saw the beginning of a new era of security and repose.

Nevertheless Germany, when Luther appeared, still presented to the eye of the observer that motion which agitates the sea after a storm of long

continuance. The calm was yet uncertain. The first breeze might make the tempest burst forth anew. Of this we shall see more than one example. The Reformation, by communicating a new impulse to the German race, for ever destroyed the old causes of agitation. It put an end to the barbarous system that had hitherto prevailed, and gave a new one to Europe.

Meanwhile the religion of Jesus Christ had exerted on Germany its peculiar influence. The third estate (the commonalty) had rapidly advanced. In the different parts of the empire, particularly in the free cities, numerous institutions arose, calculated to develop this imposing mass of the people. There the arts flourished: the burghers devoted themselves in security to the tranquil labors and sweet relations of social life. They became more and more accessible to information. Thus they daily acquired greater respect and influence. It was not magistrates, who are often compelled to adapt their conduct to the political exigencies of the times; or nobles passionately fond of military glory above all things; or an ambitious

and greedy priesthood, trading with religion as its peculiar property, that were to found the Reformation in Germany. It was to be the work of the middle classes — of the people — of the whole nation.

The peculiar character of the Germans seemed especially favorable to a religious reformation. They had not been enervated by a false civilization.

The precious seeds that the fear of God deposits among a people had not been scattered to the winds. Ancient manners still survived. In Germany was found that uprightness, fidelity, and industry — that perseverance and religious disposition, which still flourishes there, and which promises greater success to the Gospel than the fickle, scornful, and sensual character of other European nations.

The Germans had received from Rome that great element of modern civilization — the faith. Instruction, knowledge, legislation — all except their courage and their arms — had come to them

from the sacerdotal city.

Strong ties had from that time connected Germany with the Papacy. The former was a spiritual conquest of the latter, and we know to what use Rome has always applied her conquests. Other nations, who had possessed the faith and civilization before the Roman pontiff existed, had maintained a greater independence with respect to it. But this subjection of the Germans was destined only to make the reaction more powerful at the moment of awakening. When the eyes of Germany should be opened, she would tear away the trammels in which she had so long been held captive.

The slavery she had endured would give her a greater longing for deliverance and liberty, and the hardy champions of truth would go forth from that prison of restraint and discipline in which for ages her people had been confined.

There was at that time in Germany something very nearly resembling what in the political

language of our days is termed “a see-saw system.” When the head of the empire was of an energetic character, his power increased; when on the contrary he possessed little ability, the influence and authority of the princes and electors were augmented. Never had the latter felt more independent of their chief than under Maximilian at the period of the Reformation. And their leader having taken part against it, it is easy to understand how that very circumstance was favorable to the propagation of the Gospel.

In addition to this, Germany was weary of what Rome contemptuously denominated “the patience of the Germans.” The latter had in truth shown much patience since the time of Louis of Bavaria. From that period the emperors had laid down their arms, and the tiara had been placed without resistance above the crown of the Caesars. But the strife had only changed its scene of action. It had descended to lower ground. These same struggles, of which popes and emperors had set the world an example, were soon renewed on a smaller scale in every city of Germany, between the bishops and

the magistrates. The burghers had taken up the sword which the chiefs of the empire had let fall. As early as 1329, the citizens of Frankfort-on-the-Oder had resisted with intrepidity all their ecclesiastical superiors. Having been excommunicated for their fidelity to the Margrave Louis, they had remained for twenty-eight years without masses, baptism, marriage ceremonies, or funeral rites. The return of the priests and monks was greeted with laughter, like a comedy or farce. A deplorable error, no doubt, but the priests themselves were the cause of it. At the period of the Reformation these oppositions between the magistrates and the ecclesiastics had increased. Every hour the privileges and temporal assumptions of the clergy brought these two bodies into collision.

But it was not only among the burgomasters, councilors, and secretaries of the cities that Rome and her clergy found opponents. About the same time the indignation was at work among the populace. It broke out in 1493, and later in 1502, in the Rhenish provinces: the peasants, exasperated at

the heavy yoke imposed upon them by their ecclesiastical sovereigns, formed among themselves what has been called the “League of the Shoes.” They began to assemble by night in Alsacc, repairing by unfrequented paths to isolated hills, where they swore to pay in future no taxes but such as they had freely consented to, to abolish all tolls and jalage, to limit the power of the priests, and to plunder the Jews. Then placing a peasant’s shoe on the end of a pole by way of standard, they marched against the town of Schlettstadt, proposing to call to their assistance the free confederation of the Swiss: but they were soon dispersed. This was only one of the symptoms of the general fermentation that agitated the castles, towns, and rural districts of the empire.

Thus everywhere, from high to low, was heard a hollow murmur, forerunner of the thunderbolt that was soon to fall. Germany appeared ripe for the appointed task of the sixteenth century. Providence in its slow progress had prepared everything; and even the passions which God condemns, were directed by his almighty hand to

the accomplishment of his designs.

Let us take a glance at the other nations of Europe.

Thirteen small republics, placed with their allies in the center of Europe, among mountains which seemed to form its citadel, composed a simple and brave nation. Who would have looked in those sequestered valleys for the men whom God would choose to be the liberators of the Church conjointly with the children of the Germans? Who would have thought that small unknown cities — scarcely raised above barbarism, hidden behind inaccessible mountains, on the shores of lakes that had found no name in history — would surpass, as regards Christianity, even Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome? Nevertheless such was the will of Him who "causeth it to rain upon one piece of land, and the piece of land whereupon it raineth not withereth." Other circumstances besides seemed destined to oppose numerous obstacles to the progress of the Reformation in the bosom of the Helvetic

population. If the obstructions of power were to be dreaded in a monarchy, the precipitancy of the people was to be feared in a democracy.

But in Switzerland, also, the way had been prepared for the truth. It was a wild but generous stock, that had been sheltered in her deep valleys, to be grafted one day with a fruit of great value. Providence had scattered among these new people principles of courage, independence, and liberty, that were to be developed in all their majesty, so soon as the day of battle against Rome should arrive. The pope had conferred upon the Swiss the title of Protectors of the Liberty of the Church. But they seem to have understood this honorable appellation in a sense somewhat different from the pontiff. If their soldiers guarded the pope beneath the shadow of the ancient Capitol, their citizens carefully protected in the bosom of the Alps their own religious liberties against the assaults of the pope and of the clergy. The ecclesiastics were forbidden to have recourse to any foreign jurisdiction. The “Letter of the Priests” (Pfaffenbrief, 1370) was a strong protest of Swiss

independence against the abuses and power of the clergy.

Zurich was distinguished among all the states by its courageous resistance to the claims of Rome. Geneva, at the other extremity of Switzerland, was contending with its bishop. These two cities distinguished themselves above all the others in the great struggle that we have undertaken to describe.

But if the Helvetian towns, accessible to every amelioration, were to be drawn into the reform movement, it was not to be the case with the inhabitants of the mountains. Knowledge had not yet reached them. These cantons, the founders of Swiss liberty, proud of the part they had taken in the struggle for independence, were not easily disposed to imitate their younger brothers of the plain. Why should they change that faith under which they had expelled the Austrian, and which had consecrated by altars all the scenes of their triumphs? Their priests were the only enlightened guides to whom they could have recourse: their worship and their festivals relieved the monotony

of their tranquil hours, and agreeably disturbed the silence of their peaceful homes. They remained steadfast against all religious innovations.

Passing the Alps, we find ourselves in that Italy which was in the eyes of the majority the holy land of Christendom. Whence could Europe have looked for the good of the Church if not from Italy — if not from Rome?

Might not that power which raised successively so many different characters to the pontifical chair, some day place in it a pontiff who would become an instrument of blessing to the heritage of the Lord? If even there was no hope in the pontiffs, were there not bishops and councils that might reform the Church? Nothing good can come out of Nazareth: but from Jerusalem, — from Rome! ... Such might have been the ideas of men; but “God’s thoughts are not as their thoughts.” He said, “He that is filthy let him be filthy still;” and abandoned Italy to her unrighteousness. That land of ancient renown was by turns the victim of intestine war and of foreign invasion. The stratagems of policy,

the violence of factions, the strife of arms, seemed alone destined to prevail there, and to banish for a long season the peace of the Gospel.

Italy, broken to pieces, dismembered, and without unity, appeared but little suited to receive one general impulse. Each frontier was a new barrier where the truth would be stopped.

And if the truth was destined to come from the North, how could the Italians, with so refined a taste, and with social habits so delicate in their own eyes, condescend to receive any thing from the barbarous Germans?

Were the men who bestowed more admiration on the regular cadence of a sonnet than on the majesty and simplicity of the Scriptures, a proper soil for the seed of the word of God? A false civilization is, of all the various conditions of a nation, that which is most repugnant to the Gospel.

Finally, whatever might be the state of affairs, Rome was always Rome to Italy. The temporal

power of the popes not only led the different Italian states to court their alliance and their favor at any cost, but the universal dominion of Rome offered more than one inducement to the avarice and vanity of the ultra-montane states. As soon as it became a question of emancipating the rest of the world from Rome, Italy would become Italy again; domestic quarrels would not prevail to the advantage of a foreign system; and attacks aimed against the chief of the peninsular family would be sufficient to awaken common interests and affections from their long slumber.

The Reformation had thus little prospect of success on that side of the Alps. Nevertheless, there were found beyond these mountains souls prepared to receive the light of the Gospel, and Italy was not at that hour entirely disinherited.

Spain possessed what Italy did not — a serious, noble-minded, and religiously disposed population. In every age this people has reckoned pious and learned men among the members of its clergy, and it was sufficiently remote from Rome to be able to

throw off its yoke without difficulty. There are few nations in which we might have more reasonably hoped for a revival of that primitive Christianity which Spain had received perhaps from the hands of St. Paul himself. And yet Spain did not rise up among the nations. She was to fulfill this prophecy of Divine wisdom: The first shall be last. Various circumstances led to this mournful result.

Spain, considering its isolated position and distance from Germany, would be affected only in a slight degree by the shocks of that great earthquake which so violently agitated the empire. It was occupied, besides, with very different treasures from those which the word of God was then offering to the nations. The new world eclipsed the eternal world. A virgin soil, which seemed to consist of gold and silver, inflamed the imagination of all. An eager thirst for wealth left no room in the Spanish heart for nobler thoughts. A powerful clergy, having scaffolds and treasures at its disposal, ruled in the peninsula. Spain willingly rendered a servile obedience to her priests, which by releasing her from every spiritual anxiety, left

her free to give way to her passions, — to go in pursuit of riches, discoveries, and new continents. Victorious over the Moors, she had, at the cost of her noblest blood, torn the crescent from the walls of Granada and many other cities, and planted the cross of Christ in its place. This great zeal for Christianity, which appeared destined to afford the liveliest expectations, turned against the truth. How could Catholic Spain, which had crushed infidelity, fail to oppose heresy? How could those who had driven Mahomet from their beautiful country allow Luther to penetrate into it?

Their kings did even more: they equipped fleets against the Reformation, and went to Holland and to England in search of it, that they might subdue it. But these attacks elevated the nations assailed; and erelong Spain was crushed by their united power. Thus, in consequence of the Reformation, did this Catholic country lose that temporal prosperity which had made it at first reject the spiritual liberty of the Gospel. Nevertheless, the dwellers beyond the Pyrenees were a brave and generous race. Many of its noble children, with the

same ardor, but with more knowledge than those whose blood had stained the Moorish swords, came and laid down their lives as a sacrifice on the burning piles of the Inquisition.

The case was nearly the same in Portugal as in Spain. Emanuel the Fortunate gave it a “golden age,” which unfitted it for the self-denial required by the Gospel. The Portuguese thronged the newly discovered roads to the East Indies and Brazil, and turned their backs on Europe and the Reformation.

Few countries seemed better disposed for the reception of the evangelical doctrines than France. In that country almost all the intellectual and spiritual life of the Middle Ages had been concentrated. One might have been led to say, that paths had been opened in every direction for a great manifestation of the truth. Men of the most opposite characters, and whose influence had been most extensive over the French nation, were found to have some affinity with the Reformation. St. Bernard had given an example of that faith of the heart, of that inward piety, which is the noblest

feature of the Reformation. Abelard had carried into the study of theology that rational principle, which, incapable of building up what is true, is powerful to destroy what is false. Numerous pretended heretics had rekindled the flames of the word of God in the provinces. The university of Paris had stood up against the Church, and had not feared to oppose it. At the commencement of the fifteenth century of Clemangis and the Gersons had spoken out with boldness. The Pragmatic Sanction had been a great act of independence, and seemed destined to be the palladium of the Gallican liberties. The French nobles, so numerous and so jealous of their pre-eminence, and who at this period had seen their privileges gradually taken away to augment the kingly power, must have been favorably disposed to a religious revolution that might have restored some portion of the independence they had lost. The people, quick, intelligent, and susceptible of generous emotions, were as accessible to the truth as any other, if not more so. The Reformation in this country seemed likely to crown the long travail of many centuries. But the chariot of France, which appeared for so

many generations to be hastening onwards in the same direction, suddenly turned aside at the epoch of the Reformation, and took quite a contrary course. Such is the will of Him who is the guide of nations and of their rulers. The prince who was then seated in the chariot and held the reins, and who, as a patron of literature, seemed of all the chiefs of Roman-catholicism likely to be the foremost in promoting the Reformation, threw his subjects into another path. The symptoms of many centuries proved fallacious, and the impulse given to France was unavailing against the ambition and fanaticism of her kings. The house of Valois deprived her of that which should have belonged to her. Perhaps had she received the Gospel, she would have become too powerful. It was God's will to select weaker nations — nations just rising into existence, to be the depositories of his truth. France, after having been almost entirely reformed, found herself Roman-catholic in the end. The sword of her princes thrown into the balance made it incline towards Rome. Alas! another sword — that of the Reformers themselves — completed the destruction of the Reformation. Hands that had

been used to wield the sword, ceased to be raised to heaven in prayer. It is by the blood of its confessors, and not of its adversaries, that the Gospel triumphs.

At the era of the Reformation the Netherlands was one of the most flourishing countries of Europe. Its people were industrious, enlightened in consequence of the numerous relations they maintained with the different parts of the world, full of courage, and enthusiastic in the cause of their independence, privileges, and liberties. Situated at the very gates of Germany, it would be one of the first to hear the report of the Reformation. Two very distinct parties composed its population. The more southern portion, that overflowed with wealth, gave way. How could all these manufactures carried to the highest degree of perfection — this immense commerce by land and sea — Bruges, that great mart of the northern trade — Antwerp, the queen of merchant cities — how could all these resign themselves to a long and bloody struggle about questions of faith? On the contrary, the northern provinces, defended by their

sandhills, the sea, and their canals, and still more by the simplicity of their manners, and their determination to lose everything rather than the Gospel, not only preserved their freedom, their privileges, and their faith, but even achieved their independence and a glorious nationality.

England gave but little promise of what she afterwards became. Driven out of the continent, where she had long and obstinately attempted the conquest of France, she began to turn her eyes towards the sea, as to a kingdom destined to be the real object of her conquests, and whose inheritance was reserved for her. Twice converted to Christianity — once under the ancient Britons, and again under the Anglo- Saxons — she paid with great devotion the annual tribute of St. Peter’s pence. Yet high destinies were in reserve for her. Mistress of the ocean, and touching at once upon all quarters of the globe, she was to become one day, with the nation to which she should give birth, the hand of God to scatter the seeds of life in the most distant islands and over the widest continents. Already there were a few circumstances foreboding

her mighty destiny: great learning had shone in the British islands, and some glimmerings of it still remained. A crowd of foreigners — artists, merchants, and artisans — coming from the Low Countries, Germany, and other places, filled their cities and their havens. The new religious ideas would thus easily be carried thither. Finally, England had then for king an eccentric prince, who, endowed with some information and great courage, changed his projects and his ideas every hour, and turned from one side to the other according to the direction in which his violent passions drove him. It was possible that one of the Eighth Henry's caprices might some day be favorable to the Reformation.

Scotland was at this time distracted by factions. A king of five years old, a queen-regent, ambitious nobles, and an influential clergy, harassed this courageous people in every direction. They were destined, however, erelong to shine in the first rank among those who should receive the Reformation.

The three kingdoms of the North — Denmark,

Sweden, and Norway — were united under a common scepter. These rude and warlike people seemed to have little connection with the doctrine of love and peace. Yet by their very energy they were perhaps better disposed than the nations of the South to receive the power of the Gospel. But these sons of warriors and of pirates brought, methinks, too warlike a character into that protestant cause, which their swords in later times so heroically defended.

Russia, driven into the extremity of Europe, had but few relations with the other states. Besides, she belonged to the Greek communion; and the Reformation effected in the Western exerted little or no influence on the Eastern church.

Poland seemed well prepared for a reform. The neighborhood of the Bohemian and Moravian Christians had disposed it to receive the evangelical impulse, which by its vicinity to Germany was likely to be promptly communicated. As early as 1500 the nobility of Great Poland had demanded that the cup should be given to the laity,

by appealing to the customs of the primitive Church. The liberty enjoyed in its cities, the independence of its nobles, made it a secure asylum for all Christians who had been persecuted in their own country. The truth they carried with them was joyfully received by a great number of the inhabitants. Yet it is one of the countries which, in our days, possesses the fewest confessors.

The flame of the Reformation, which had long burnt brightly in Bohemia, had been nearly extinguished in blood. Nevertheless, some precious remnants, escaped from the slaughter, were still alive to see the day which Huss had foretold.

Hungary had been torn in pieces by intestine wars under the government of princes without ability or experience, and who had eventually bound the fate of their subjects to Austria, by enrolling this powerful family among the heirs to their crown.

Such was the state of Europe at the beginning of the sixteenth century, which was destined to

produce so great a transformation in christian society.

Chapter 6

Roman Theology

Having described the condition of the nations and princes of Europe, we now proceed to the preparations for the great Reform which existed in theology and in the Church.

The singular system of theology that was established in the Church, was destined to contribute powerfully to open the eyes of the new generation.

Formed for an age of darkness, as if that age would last for ever, that system was to be left behind, and to be rent in every direction, so soon as the age grew in understanding. This was the result. The popes had added now this and now that to the Christian doctrines. They had neither changed nor removed anything except it would not square with their hierarchical system; what was not contrary to their plans might remain until further orders. It contained certain true doctrines, such as

Redemption, and the power of the Holy Ghost, of which a skillful divine, if there was one to be found at that time, might have availed himself to combat and overthrow all the others. The pure gold mingled with the base alloy in the treasures of the Vatican, might have easily led to the discovery of the fraud. It is true, that if any courageous adversary turned his attention towards it, the winnowing-fan of Rome immediately swept away this pure grain. But these very condemnations only served to augment the confusion.

This confusion was immense, and the pretended unity was but one wide disorder. At Rome there were the doctrines of the court and the doctrines of the church. The faith of the metropolis differed from that of the provinces. In the latter, too, this diversity was infinite. There was the faith of the princes, of the people, and of the religious orders. There was a distinction between the opinions of this convent and of that district, of this doctor and of that monk.

In order that the truth might exist peaceably in

the ages when Rome would have crushed her with its iron scepter, she had followed the example of the insect that weaves a chrysalis of its threads in which to shelter itself during the inclement season. And, strange to say, the instruments employed by divine truth to this end were the so-much decried schoolmen. These industrious artisans of thought had unravelled every theological idea, and of all their threads had woven a web, under which it would have been difficult for more skillful persons than their contemporaries to recognize the truth in its pristine purity. We may regret that the insect, so full of life, and glowing with the brightest colors, should enclose itself, to all appearance dead, in its dark cell; but in this covering is its safety. The case was the same with truth. If the interested and suspicious policy of Rome, in the day of its power, had seen her unveiled, it would have crushed her, or at least endeavored so to do. Disguised as she was by the theologians of the time, under endless subtleties and distinctions, the popes did not recognize her, or saw that in this condition she could not injure them. They took the work and the workmen under their protection. But the season

might come in which this hidden truth would raise her head, and throw off the toils that had covered her. Having gained new strength in her apparent tomb, she would be seen in the day of her resurrection gaining the victory over Rome and its errors. This spring-time arrived. At the very period when these absurd coverings of the schoolmen were falling one after another under the skillful attacks and the sneers of the new generation, the truth issued from them, blooming in youth and beauty.

It was not alone from the writings of the schoolmen that powerful testimony was given to the truth. Christianity had everywhere mingled something of its own life with the life of the people. The Church of Christ was a dilapidated building; but in digging around it, a portion of the living rock on which it had been originally built was discovered among its foundations. Numerous institutions dating from the pure ages of the Church still existed, and could not fail to awaken in many souls evangelical sentiments opposed to the prevailing superstition. Inspired men, the old

doctors of the Church, whose writings were deposited in various libraries, raised here and there a solitary voice. We may hope that it was listened to in silence by many an attentive ear. Let us not doubt that the Christians — and how pleasing is the thought! — had many brethren and sisters in those monasteries, where we too easily discover little else than hypocrisy and licentiousness.

The Church had fallen, because the great doctrine of justification by faith in the Savior had been taken away from her. It was necessary, therefore, before she could rise again, that this doctrine should be restored to her. As soon as the fundamental truth should be re-established in Christendom, all the errors and observances that had taken its place — all that multitude of saints, of works, penances, masses, indulgences, etc, would disappear. As soon as the one only Mediator and his only sacrifice were acknowledged, all other mediators and sacrifices would vanish. “This article of justification,” says a man whom we may consider enlightened on the matter, “is what creates the Church, nourishes it, edifies it, preserves and

defends it: no one can teach worthily in the Church, or oppose an adversary with success, if he does not adhere to this truth. This," adds the writer whom we quote, in allusion to the earliest prophecy, "is the heel that shall bruise the head of the serpent." God, who was preparing his work, raised up during the course of ages a long line of witnesses to the truth. But of this truth to which these generous men bore witness, they had not a sufficiently clear knowledge, or at least were not able to set it forth with adequate distinctness. Unable to accomplish this task, they were all that they should have been to prepare the way for it. Let us add, however, that if they were not ready for the work, the work was not ready for them. The measure was not yet full: the ages had not yet accomplished their prescribed course; the need of the true remedy was not as yet generally felt.

Scarcely had Rome usurped her power, before a strong opposition was formed against her, which was continued during the Middle Ages.

Archbishop Claudius of Turin, in the ninth

century; Pierre de Bruys, his disciple Henry, and Arnold of Brescia, in the twelfth century, in France and in Italy, labored to re-establish the worship of God in spirit and in truth; but for the most part they looked for this worship too much in the absence of images and of outward observances.

The Mystics, who have existed in almost every age, seeking in silence for holiness of heart, righteousness of life, and tranquil communion with God, beheld with sorrow and affright the abominations of the Church. They carefully abstained from the quarrels of the schools and from the useless discussions under which real piety had been buried. They endeavored to withdraw men from the vain formality of external worship, from the noise and pomp of ceremonies, to lead them to that inward repose of a soul which looks to God for all its happiness. They could not do this without coming into collision on every side with the received opinions, and without laying bare the wounds of the Church. But at the same time they had not a clear notion of the doctrine of justification by faith.

The Waldenses, far superior to the Mystics in purity of doctrine, compose a long line of witnesses to the truth. Men more unfettered than the rest of the Church seem from the most distant times to have inhabited the summits of the Piedmontese Alps; their number was augmented and their doctrine purified by the disciples of Valdo. From their mountain-heights the Waldenses protested during a long series of ages against the superstitions of Rome. “They contend for the lively hope which they have in God through Christ — for the regeneration and interior revival by faith, hope, and charity — for the merits of Jesus Christ, and the allsufficiency of his grace and righteousness.” Yet this primal truth of the justification of sinners, — this main doctrine, that should have risen from the midst of all the rest like Mont Blanc from the bosom of the Alps, was not sufficiently prominent in their system. Its summit was not yet raised high enough.

Pierre Vaud or Valdo, a rich merchant of Lyons (1170), sold all his goods and gave them to the

poor. He and his friends appear to have aimed at reestablishing the perfection of primitive Christianity in the common affairs of life. He therefore began also with the branches and not with the roots.

Nevertheless his preaching was powerful because he appealed to Scripture, and it shook the Roman hierarchy to its very foundations.

Wickliffe arose in England in, and appealed from the pope to the word of God: but the real internal wound in the body of the Church was in his eyes only one of the numerous symptoms of the disease.

John Huss preached in Bohemia a century before Luther preached in Saxony. He seems to have penetrated deeper than his predecessors into the essence of christian truth. He prayed to Christ for grace to glory only in his cross and in the inestimable humiliation of his sufferings. But his attacks were directed less against the errors of the Romish church than the scandalous lives of the

clergy. Yet he was, if we may be allowed the expression, the John-Baptist of the Reformation. The flames of his pile kindled a fire in the Church that cast a brilliant light into the surrounding darkness, and whose glimmerings were not to be so readily extinguished.

John Huss did more: prophetic words issued from the depths of his dungeon. He foresaw that a real reformation of the Church was at hand.

When driven out of Prague and compelled to wander through the fields of Bohemia, where an immense crowd followed his steps and hung upon his words, he had cried out: “The wicked have begun by preparing a treacherous snare for the goose. But if even the goose, which is only a domestic bird, a peaceful animal, and whose flight is not very high in the air, has nevertheless broken through their toils, other birds, soaring more boldly towards the sky, will break through them with still greater force.

Instead of a feeble goose, the truth will send

forth eagles and keen-eyed vultures.” This prediction was fulfilled by the reformers.

When the venerable priest had been summoned by Sigismund’s order before the council of Constance, and had been thrown into prison, the chapel of Bethlehem, in which he had proclaimed the Gospel and the future triumphs of Christ, occupied his mind, much more than his own defense. One night the holy martyr saw in imagination, from the depths of his dungeon, the pictures of Christ that he had painted on the walls of his oratory, effaced by the pope and his bishops. This vision distressed him: but on the next day he saw many painters occupied in restoring these figures in greater number and in brighter colors. As soon as their task was ended, the painters, who were surrounded by an immense crowd, exclaimed: “Now let the popes and bishops come! they shall never efface them more!” And many people rejoiced in Bethlehem, and I with them, adds John Huss. — “Busy yourself with your defense rather than with your dreams,” said his faithful friend, the knight of Chlum, to whom he had communicated

this vision. “I am no dreamer,” replied Huss, “but I maintain this for certain, that the image of Christ will never be effaced.

They have wished to destroy it, but it shall be painted afresh in all hearts by much better preachers than myself. The nation that loves Christ will rejoice at this. And I, awaking from among the dead, and rising, so to speak, from my grave, shall leap with great joy.” A century passed away; and the torch of the Gospel, lighted up anew by the reformers, illuminated indeed many nations, that rejoiced in its brightness.

But it was not only among those whom the church of Rome looks upon as her adversaries that the word of life was heard during these ages.

Catholicism itself — let us say it for our consolation — courts numerous witnesses to the truth within its pale. The primitive building had been consumed; but a generous fire smoldered beneath its ashes, and from time to time sent forth many brilliant sparks.

It is an error to believe that Christianity did not exist before the Reformation, save under the Romancatholic form, and that it was not till then that a section of the Church assumed the form of Protestantism.

Among the doctors who flourish prior to the sixteenth century, a great number no doubt had a leaning towards the system which the Council of Trent put forth in 1562; but many also inclined towards the doctrines professed at Augsburg by the Protestants in 1530; and the majority perhaps oscillated between these two poles.

Anselm of Canterbury laid down as the very essence of Christianity the doctrines of the incarnation and atonement; and in a work in which he teaches us how to die, he says to the departing soul: “Look only to the merits of Jesus Christ.” St. Bernard proclaimed with a powerful voice the mysteries of Redemption. “If my sin cometh from another,” says he, “why should not my righteousness be granted me in the same manner?

Assuredly it is better for me that it should be given me, than that it should be innate." Many schoolmen, and in later times the Chancellor Gerson, vigorously attacked the errors and abuses of the Church.

But let us reflect above all on the thousands of souls, obscure and unknown to the world, who have nevertheless been partakers of the real life of Christ.

A monk named Arnoldi everyday offered up this fervent prayer in his quiet cell: "O Lord Jesus Christ! I believe that thou alone art my redemption and my righteousness." Christopher of Utenheim, a pious bishop of Basle, had his name inscribed on a picture painted on glass, which is still in that city, and surrounded it with this motto, which he desired to have continually before his eyes: "My hope is in the cross of Christ; I seek grace and not works." A poor Carthusian friar, named Martin, wrote a touching confession, in which he says: "O most merciful God! I know that I cannot be saved and

satisfy thy righteousness otherwise than by the merits, by the most innocent passion, and by the death of thy dearly beloved Son.....Holy Jesus! all my salvation is in thy hands. Thou canst not turn away from me the hands of thy love, for they have created me, formed me, and redeemed me. Thou hast written my name with an iron pen, in great mercy and in an indelible manner, on thy side, on thy hands, and on thy feet," etc.etc. Then the good Carthusian placed his confession in a wooden box, and enclosed it in a hole he made in the wall of his cell. The piety of brother Martin would never have been known, if the box had not been discovered on the 21st December 1776, as some workmen were pulling down an old building that had formed part of the Carthusian convent at Basle. How many convents may not have concealed such treasures!

But these holy men possessed this touching faith for themselves alone, and knew not how to communicate it to others. Living in retirement, they could say more or less what brother Martin confided to his box: "And if I cannot confess these things with my mouth, I confess them at least with

my pen and with my heart.” The word of truth was in the sanctuary of a few pious souls; but, to use the language of the Gospel, it had not “free course” in the world.

However, if they did not always confess aloud the doctrine of salvation, they were not afraid at least to protest openly even in the bosom of the Church of Rome, against the abuses that disgraced it.

Scarcely had the Councils of Constance and Basle, in which Huss and his disciples had been condemned, terminated their sittings, when this noble line of witnesses against Rome, which we have pointed out, recommenced with greater brilliancy. Men of generous dispositions, shocked at the abominations of the papacy, arose like the Old-Testament prophets, whose fate they also shared, and uttered like them their denunciations in a voice of thunder. Their blood stained the scaffolds, and their ashes were scattered to the winds.

Thomas Conecte, a Carmelite friar, appeared in Flanders. He declared that “the grossest abominations were practiced at Rome, that the Church required a reform, and that so long as we served God, we should not fear the pope’s excommunications.” All the country listened with enthusiasm; Rome condemned him to the stake in 1432, and his contemporaries declared that he had been translated to heaven. Cardinal Andrew, archbishop of Crayn, being sent to Rome as the emperor’s ambassador, was struck with dismay at discovering that the papal sanctity, in which he had devoutly believed, was a mere fiction; and in his simplicity he addressed Sixtus IV in the language of evangelical remonstrance. Mockery and persecution were his only answer. Upon this he endeavored in to assemble a new council at Basle. “The whole Church,” said he, “is shaken by divisions, heresies, sins, vices, unrighteousness, errors, and countless evils, so as to be nigh swallowed up by the devouring abyss of damnation. For this reason we proclaim a general council for the reformation of the Catholic faith and the purification of morals.” The archbishop

was thrown into prison at Basle, where he died. The inquisitor, Henry Institoris, who was the first to oppose him, uttered these remarkable words: “All the world cries out and demands a council; but there is no human power that can reform the Church by a council. The Most High will find other means, which are at present unknown to us, although they may be at our very doors, to bring back the Church to its pristine condition.” This remarkable prophecy, delivered by an inquisitor, at the very period of Luther’s birth, is the best apology for the Reformation.

Jerome Savonarola shortly after entering the Dominican order at Bologna in 1475, devoted himself to continual prayers, fasting, and mortification, and cried, “Thou, O God, art good, and in thy goodness teach me thy righteousness.” He preached with energy in Florence, to which city he had removed in 1489. His voice carried conviction; his countenance was lit up with enthusiasm; and his action possessed enchanting grace. “We must regenerate the Church,” said he; and he professed the great principle that alone

could effect this regeneration. “God,” he exclaimed, “remits the sins of men, and justifies them by his mercy. There are as many compassions in heaven as there are justified men upon earth; for none are saved by their own works. No man can boast of himself; and if, in the presence of God, we could ask all these justified sinners — Have you been saved by your own strength? — all would reply as with one voice, Not unto us, O Lord! not unto us; but to thy name be the glory! — Therefore, O God, do I seek thy mercy, and I bring not unto thee my own righteousness; but when by thy grace thou justifiest me, then thy righteousness belongs unto me; for grace is the righteousness of God. — So long, O man, so long as thou believest not, thou art, because of thy sin, destitute of grace. — O God, save me by thy righteousness, that is to say, in thy Son, who alone among men was found without sin!” Thus did the grand and holy doctrine of justification by faith gladden Savonarola’s heart. In vain did the presidents of the Churches oppose him; he knew that the oracles of God were far above the visible Church, and that he must proclaim these oracles with the aid of the Church,

without it, or even in spite of it. “Fly,” cried he, “fly far from Babylon!” and it was Rome that he thus designated, and Rome erelong replied in her usual manner. In 1497, the infamous Alexander VI issued a brief against him; and in 1498, torture and the stake terminated this reformer’s life.

John Vitrarius, a Franciscan monk of Tournay, whose monastic spirit does not appear to have been of a very lofty range, vigorously attacked the corruptions of the Church. “It is better to cut a child’s throat (he said) than to place him in a religious order that is not reformed. — If thy curate, or any other priest, detains a woman in his house, you should go and drag the woman by force, or otherwise, out of the house. — There are some who repeat certain prayers to the Virgin Mary, that they may see her at the hour of death. But thou shalt see the devil, and not the virgin.” A recantation was required, and the monk gave way in 1498.

John Lallier, doctor of the Sorbonne, stood forth in 1484 against the tyrannical dominion of the

hierarchy. “All the clergy,” said he, “have received equal power from Christ. — The Roman Church is not the head of other Churches. — You should keep the commandments of God and of the apostles: and as for the commandments of bishops and all the other lords of the Church.....they are but straw! They have ruined the Church by their crafty devices. — The priests of the Eastern Church sin not by marrying, and I believe that in the Western Church we should not sin were we also to marry. — Since the time of Sylvester, the Romish Church is no longer the Church of Christ, but a state-church — a money-getting church.

— We are not bound to believe in the legends of the saints, any more than in the Chronicles of France.” John of Wesalia, doctor of divinity at Erfurth, a man distinguished for this energy and talents, attacked the errors on which the hierarchy was founded, and proclaimed the Holy Scriptures as the only source of faith.

“It is not religion (by which he meant a monastic life) that saves us,” said he to the monks;

“it is the grace of God. — God from all eternity has established a book in which he has written the names of all his elect.

Whoever is not inscribed therein, will never be so; and whoever is therein inscribed, will never see his name blotted out. — It is by the grace of God alone that the elect are saved. He whom God is willing to save by the gift of his grace, will be saved, though all the priests in the world should wish to condemn and excommunicate him. And he whom God will condemn, though all should wish to save him, will nevertheless be condemned. — By what audacity do the successors of the apostles enjoin, not what Christ has prescribed in his holy books, but what they themselves have devised, carried away, as they are, by thirst for gold and by the desire of ruling? — I despise the Pope, the Church and, the Councils, and I give Christ the glory.” Wesalia, having arrived gradually at these convictions, professed them boldly from the pulpit, and entered into communication with the delegates from the Hussites. Feeble, and bending under the weight of years, a prey to sickness and leaning

upon his staff, this courageous old man appeared with tottering steps before the Inquisition, and perished in its dungeons in 1482.

John of Goch, prior of Malines, about the same period, extolled christian liberty as the essence of every virtue. He charged the prevailing doctrines with Pelagianism, and denominated Thomas Aquinas “the prince of error.” “The canonical scriptures alone,” said he, “are entitled to a sure confidence, and have an undeniable authority. The writings of the ancient Fathers have no authority, but so far as they are conformable with canonical truth. The common proverb says truly: Satan would be ashamed to think of what a monk dares undertake.” But the most remarkable of these forerunners of the Reformation was undoubtedly John Wessel, surnamed “the Light of the World,” a man full of courage and of love for the truth, who was doctor in divinity successively at Cologne, Louvain, Paris,

Heidelberg, and Groningen, and of whom Luther says: “Had I read his works sooner, my

enemies might have thought I had derived everything from Wessel, so much are we of one mind." — "St. Paul and St. James," says Wessel, "preach different but not contrary doctrines. Both maintain that 'the just shall live by faith;' but by a faith working by charity. He who, at the sound of the Gospel, believes, desires, hopes, trusts in the glad tidings, and loves Him who justifies and blesses him, forthwith yields himself up entirely to Him whom he loves, and attributes no merit to himself, since he knows that of himself he has nothing. — The sheep must discern the things on which he feeds, and avoid a corrupted nutriment, even when presented by the shepherd himself. The people should follow the shepherd into the pastures; but when he ceases to lead them into the pastures, he is no longer a shepherd, and then, since he does not fulfill his duty, the flock is not bound to follow him. Nothing is more effectual to the destruction of the Church than a corrupted clergy. All Christians, even the humblest and most simple, are bound to resist those who are destroying the Church. We must obey the precepts of doctors and of prelates only according to the

measure laid down by St. Paul (1 Thessalonians 5:21); that is to say, so far as, ‘sitting in Moses’ seat,’ they teach according to Moses. We are God’s servants, and not the pope’s, as it is said: Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. The Holy Spirit has reserved to himself the work of renewing, vivifying, preserving, and increasing the unity of the Church, and has not abandoned it to the Roman pontiff, who frequently cares nothing about it. — Even her sex does not prevent a woman, if she is faithful and prudent, and if she has charity shed abroad in her heart, from being able to feel, judge, approve, and decide by a judgment that God will ratify.” Thus, in proportion as the Reformation drew nigh, were the voices multiplied that proclaimed the truth. We might be led to say that the Church intended showing by these means that the Reformation existed before Luther. Protestantism arose in the Church on the very day in which the germs of Popery showed themselves; as in the political world conservative principles have existed from the very moment when the despotism of nobles or the disorders of factions have raised their heads.

Protestantism was sometimes even stronger than the Papacy in the centuries immediately preceding the Reformation. What could Rome oppose to all the witnesses we have just heard, at the time when their voices re-echoed through the earth? — A few monks without either learning or piety.

To this we may add, that the Reformation had taken root, not only among the doctors of the Church, but also among the people. The opinions of Wickliffe, issuing from Oxford, had spread over all Christendom, and had found adherents in Bavaria, Swabia, Franconia, and Prussia. In Bohemia, from the very bosom of discord and of war, had come forth at last a peaceful and christian community, reminding the world of the primitive Church, and giving powerful testimony to the grand principle of Gospel opposition, that “Christ, and not Peter and his successors, is the rock on which the Church is founded.” Belonging equally to the German and Sclavonic races, these simple Christians had sent forth missionaries into the

midst of the various nations who spoke their language, noiselessly to gain over followers to their opinions. Nicholas Kuss, who was twice visited by them at Rostock, began in 1511 to preach openly against the pope. It is important to notice this state of affairs. When the Wisdom from on high shall utter his lessons in a still louder voice, there will be minds and hearts everywhere to listen to them. When the Husbandman, who has been continually traversing his Church, shall go forth to a new and to a greater sowing, the soil will be prepared to receive the grain. When the trumpet of the Angel of the covenant, that has never ceased to be heard in the world, shall send forth a louder peal, numbers will gird themselves to the battle.

The Church already had a presentiment that the hour of combat was approaching. If more than one philosopher announced in some measure, during the last century, the revolution in which it closed, shall we be astonished that many doctors at the end of the fifteenth century had foreseen the approaching change that would regenerate the Church?

Andrew Proles, provincial of the Augustines, who for nearly half a century presided over that congregation, and who, with unshaken firmness, maintained in his order the doctrines of St. Augustine, being assembled with his brethren in the convent of Himmelspforte, near Wernigerode, used often to stop them while reading the word of God, and say: “My brethren! ye hear the testimony of the Holy Scriptures! They declare that by grace we are what we are, and that by it alone we hold all that we possess.

Whence then proceed so much darkness and such horrible superstitions?.....Oh, my brethren! Christianity needs a bold and a great reform, and methinks I see it already approaching.” Then would the monks cry out, “Why do you not begin this reform yourself, and oppose such a cloud of errors?” — “You see, my brethren,” replied the aged provincial, “that I am bent with the weight of years, and weak in body, and that I have not the learning, ability, and eloquence, that so great an undertaking requires. But God will raise up a hero,

who by his age, strength, talents, learning, genius, and eloquence, shall hold the foremost place. He will begin the Reformation; he will oppose error, and God will give him boldness to resist the mighty ones of the earth." An old monk of Himmelspforte, who had often heard these words, communicated them to Flacius. It was in the very order of which Proles was provincial that the Christian hero he foretold was to appear.

A monk named John Hilten was an inmate of the Franciscan convent at Eisenach in Thuringia. The prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation of St.

John were his especial study. He even wrote a commentary on these works, and censured the most flagrant abuses of the monastic life. The exasperated monks threw him into prison. His advanced age and the filthiness of his dungeon brought on a dangerous illness: he asked for the superior, and the latter had scarcely arrived before he burst into a violent passion, and without listening to the prisoner's complaints, bitterly abused his doctrine, that was opposed, adds the

chronicle, to the monks' kitchen. The Franciscan, forgetting his malady and groaning heavily, replied: "I bear your insults calmly for the love of Christ; for I have said nothing that can endanger the monastic state: I have only censured its most crying abuses. But," continued he (according to what Melancthon records in his Apology for the Augsburg Confession of Faith), "another man will arise in the year of our Lord 1516: he will destroy you, and you shall not be able to resist him." John Hilten, who had prophesied that the end of the world would come in 1651, was less mistaken in pointing out the year when the future Reformer would appear. Not long after, he was born in a small village at a little distance from the monk's dungeon: in this very town of Eisenach he commenced his studies, and only one year later than the imprisoned friar had stated, he publicly entered upon the Reformation.

Chapter 7

Third Preparation

Thus princes and people, living members of the Church and theologians, were laboring each in their sphere to prepare the work which the sixteenth century was to accomplish. But the Reformation was destined to find another auxiliary in learning. The human mind was gaining strength. This circumstance alone would have wrought its emancipation. Let but a small seed fall near a time-eaten wall, and as the tree grows up, the wall will be overthrown.

The Roman pontiff had constituted himself the guardian of the people, and his superior intelligence rendered this an easy task. For a long time he had kept them in a state of pupilage, but now they were breaking bounds on every side. This venerable guardianship, which derived its origin from the principles of eternal life and civilization that Rome had communicated to the barbarous nations, could no longer be exercised without

opposition. A formidable antagonist had taken up his position against it in order to control it. The natural tendency of the human mind to expand, to examine, to learn, had given birth to this new power. Men’s eyes were opened: they demanded a reason for each step taken by this long-venerated guide, under whose direction they had walked in silence, so long as their eyes were closed. The nations of modern Europe had passed the age of infancy; their manhood was beginning. Their artless and credulous simplicity had given way to an inquiring spirit — to a reason impatient to fathom things to the very bottom. They asked what had been God’s object in making a revelation to the world, and whether men had a right to set themselves up as mediators between God and their brethren.

One thing only could have saved the church: this was to elevate itself still higher than the people. To be on a level with them was not sufficient. But men soon found, on the contrary, that she was much below them. She began to take a downward course, at the very time that they were

ascending. When men began to soar towards the regions of intelligence, the priesthood was found engrossed in earthly pursuits and human interests. It is a phenomenon that has often been renewed in history. The eaglet’s wings had grown; and there was no man whose hand could reach it and stay its flight.

It was in Italy that the human mind first began to soar above the earth.

The doctrines of the schoolmen and romantic poetry had never reigned undisturbed in that peninsula. Some faint recollections of antiquity had always remained in Italy, — recollections that were revived in great strength towards the end of the Middle Ages, and which erelong communicated a fresh impulse to the human mind.

Already in the fourteenth century had Dante and Petrarch revived the credit of the ancient Roman poets; at the same time the former placed the mightiest popes in his “Inferno,” and the second called with boldness for the primitive

constitution of the Church. At the beginning of the fifteenth century John of Ravenna taught the Latin literature with great renown at Padua and Florence; and Chrysoloras interpreted the masterpieces of Greece at Florence and at Pavia.

While learning was thus issuing from the prisons in which it had been held captive in Europe, the East imparted fresh light to the West. The standard of Mahomet, planted on the walls of Constantinople in 1453, had driven its learned men into exile. They had carried the learning of Greece with them into Italy. The torch of the ancients rekindled the minds that had been for ages quenched in darkness. George of Trebizond, Argyropolos, Bessarion, Lascaris, Chalcondylas, and many others, inspired the West with their own love for Greece and its noble works of genius. The patriotism of the Italians was awakened; and there arose in Italy a great number of learned men, among whom shone Gasparino, Aurispa, Aretino, Poggio, and Valla, who endeavored in like manner to restore the writers of ancient Rome to the honor they merited. There was at that period a great burst

of light, and Rome was doomed to suffer by it.

This passion for antiquity which took possession of the humanists, shook in the most elevated minds their attachment to the Church, for “no man can serve two masters.” At the same time the studies to which they devoted themselves, placed at the disposition of these learned men a method entirely new and unknown to the schoolmen, of examining and judging the teaching of the Church. Finding in the Bible, much more than in the works of theologians, the beauties that charmed them in the classic authors, the humanists were fully inclined to place the Bible above the doctors. They reformed the taste, and thus prepared the way for the Reformation of the faith.

These scholars, it is true, loudly protested that their studies did not strike at the faith of the Church; yet they attacked the schoolmen long before the Reformers did and turned into ridicule those barbarians, those “Teutons,” who had existed but not lived. Some even proclaimed the doctrines of the Gospel, and laid hands on what Rome held

most dear. Dante, although adhering to many Romish doctrines, had already proclaimed the power of faith, as did the reformers. “It is true faith that renders us citizens of heaven,” said he. “Faith according to the Gospel is the principle of life; it is the spark that, spreading daily more and more, becomes a living flame, and shines on us, like a star in heaven. Without faith there is no good work, nor upright life, that can avail us. However great be the sin, the arms of Divine grace are wider still, and embrace all who turn to God. The soul is not lost through the anathemas of the pontiff; and eternal love can still reach it, so long as hope retains her verdant blossom. From God, from God alone, cometh our righteousness by faith.” And speaking of the Church, Dante exclaims: “O my bark, how deeply art thou laden! O Constantine, what mischief has been engendered, I will not say by thy conversion, but by that offering which the wealthy father then received from thee!” Somewhat later, Laurentius Valla applied the study of antiquity to the opinions of the Church: he denied the authenticity of the correspondence between Christ and King Abgar; he rejected the

tradition of the drawing up of the Apostles' Creed; and sapped the foundation on which reposed the pretended donation of Constantine. Still this great light which the study of antiquity threw out in the fifteenth century was calculated only to destroy: it could not build up. Neither Homer nor Virgil could save the Church. The revival of learning, sciences, and arts, was not the principle of the Reformation. The paganism of the poets, as it reappeared in Italy, rather confirmed the paganism of the heart. The skepticism of the followers of Aristotle, and the contempt for everything that did not appertain to philology, took possession of many literary men, and engendered an incredulity which, even while affecting submission to the Church, attacked the most important truths of religion. Peter Pomponatius, the most distinguished representative of this impious tendency, publicly taught at Bologna and Padua that the immortality of the soul and the doctrine of providence were mere philosophical problems. John Francis Pico, nephew of Pico of Mirandola, speaks of one pope who did not believe in God; and of another who, having acknowledged to a friend his disbelief in the

immortality of the soul, appeared to him one night after death, and said: “Alas! the eternal fire that is now consuming me makes me feel but too sensibly the immortality of soul which I had thought would die with the body!” This may remind us of those remarkable words spoken, it is asserted, by Leo X to his secretary Bembo: “Every age knows how useful this fable of Christ has been to us and ours” .....Contemptible superstitions were attacked, but incredulity with its disdainful and mocking sneer was set up in their place. To laugh at everything, even at what was most holy, was the fashion and the badge of a freethinker. Religion was considered only as a means of governing the world. “I fear,” said Erasmus in 1516, “that with the study of ancient literature, the olden paganism will reappear.” It is true that then, as after the ridicule of the Augustan age, and as even in our days after the sneers of the last century, a new Platonism arose and attacked this rash skepticism, and sought, like the philosophy of the present times, to inspire a certain degree of respect for Christianity, and to rekindle a religious feeling in the heart. The Medici at Florence encouraged these efforts of the

Platonists. But no merely philosophical religion can ever regenerate the Church or the world. It may lose its strength in a kind of mystical enthusiasm; but as it is supercilious, and despises the preaching of the cross of Christ, pretending to see in the Gospel doctrines little else but figures and symbols, incomprehensible to the majority of mankind, it will ever be powerless to reform and save.

What then would have been the result, had real Christianity not reappeared in the world, and if faith had not once more filled all hearts with its own strength and holiness? The Reformation preserved both religion and society. If the Church of Rome had had God’s glory and the welfare of the people at heart, she would have welcomed the Reformation with joy. But what was this to a Leo the Tenth?

And yet a torch could not be lighted in Italy without its rays shining beyond the Alps. The affairs of the Church kept up a continual intercourse between this peninsula and the other

parts of Christendom. The barbarians felt erelong the superiority and superciliousness of the Italians, and began to be ashamed of their defects of language and of style. A few young noblemen, such as Dalberg, Langen, and Spiegelberg, burning with the desire of knowledge, visited Italy, and brought back to Germany and imparted to their friends the learning, the grammar, and the classic authors they so much desired. Soon there appeared a man of distinguished talents, Rodolph Agricola, whose learning and genius won for him as great veneration as if he had lived in the age of Augustus or of Pericles. The ardor of his mind and the fatigues of the school wore him out in a few years; but in the intercourse of private life he had trained up noble disciples, who carried their master's zeal over all Germany. Often when assembled around him had they deplored the darkness of the Church, and asked why St. Paul so frequently repeats that men are justified by faith and not by works. ....At the feet of these new teachers was soon gathered a youthful but rude band of scholars, living upon alms, studying without books; and who, divided into societies of priests of Bacchus, arque-busiers,

and others, passed in disorderly troops from town to town, and from school to school. No matter; these strange companies were the beginning of a literary public. Gradually the masterpieces of antiquity issued from the German presses and supplanted the schoolmen; and the art of printing, discovered at Mentz in 1440, multiplied the voices that boldly remonstrated against the corruptions of the Church, and those not less powerful, which invited the human mind into new paths of inquiry.

The study of ancient literature produced very different effects in Germany from those which followed it in Italy and in France: it was there combined with faith. The Germans immediately looked for the advantage that might accrue to religion from these new literary pursuits. What had produced in Italian minds little more than a minute and barren refinement of the understanding, pervaded the whole being of the Germans, warmed their hearts, and prepared them for a brighter light. The first restorers of learning in Italy and in France were remarkable for their levity, and frequently also for their immorality. Their successors in

Germany, animated by a serious feeling, zealously went in search of truth. Italy, offering up her incense to literature and profane learning, beheld the rise of a skeptical opposition.

Germany, occupied with deep theological questions, and thrown back upon herself, saw the rise of an opposition based on faith. In the one country the foundations of the Church were undermined; in the other they were re-established on their true basis. A remarkable society was formed in the empire, composed of liberal, generous-minded, and learned men, who counted princes among their number, and who endeavored to make learning profitable to religion. Some brought to their studies the humble faith of children; others, an enlightened and penetrating intellect, inclined perhaps to overstep the bounds of legitimate freedom and criticism: yet both contributed to clear the entrance of the temple from the superstitions that had encumbered it.

The monkish theologians perceived their danger, and began to clamor against these very

studies which they had tolerated in Italy and France, because they had there gone hand in hand with frivolity and profligacy. A conspiracy was formed amongst them against literature and science, for behind them faith was seen advancing. A monk, cautioning a person against the heresies of Erasmus, was asked in what they consisted. He acknowledged that he had not read the work of which he was speaking, and could only say that “it was written in too pure Latinity.” The disciples of learning and the scholastic divines soon came to open war.

The latter beheld with alarm the movement that was taking place in the realms of intellect, and thought that immobility and darkness would be the surest guardians of the Church. It was to save Rome that they opposed the revival of letters; but in this they contributed to its fall. Rome herself had a great share in producing this result. Momentarily led astray under the pontificate of Leo X, she deserted her old friends, and clasped her young adversaries in her arms. Popery and learning formed an alliance that seemed likely to dissolve

the union between the monastic orders and the hierarchy.

The popes did not at the first glance perceive that what they had taken for a plaything was in reality a sword that might cause their death. In like manner, during the last century, princes were seen welcoming to their courts political and philosophical principles which, had they yielded to all their influences, would have overturned their thrones. Such an alliance was not of long duration. Learning went forward, without a care as to what might endanger the power of its patron. The monks and schoolmen were well aware that to desert the pope would be to abandon themselves: and the pope, notwithstanding the brief patronage he accorded to the fine arts, was not less active, when he saw the danger, in taking measures the most contrary to the spirit of the times.

The universities defended themselves, as best they could, against the intrusion of this new light. Rhagius was expelled from Cologne, Celtes from Leipsic, and Hermann von dem Busch from

Rostock. Still the new doctors, and the ancient classics with them, gradually established themselves, and frequently with the aid of the ruling princes, in these superior academies. In despite of the schoolmen, societies of grammarians and of poets were soon formed in them. Everything was to be converted into Greek and Latin, even to their very names. How could the admirers of Sophocles and of Virgil be known by such barbarous appellations as Krachenberger of Schwarzerd? At the same time a spirit of independence spread through the universities. The students were no longer seen in seminarist fashion, with their books under their arms, walking demurely, respectfully, and with downcast eyes, behind their masters. The petulance of Martial and of Ovid had passed into these new disciples of the Muses.

They hailed with transport the ridicule heaped on the dialectic theologians; and the heads of the literary movement were sometimes accused of favoring, and even of exciting, the disorderly proceedings of the scholars.

Thus a new world, sprung out of antiquity, had arisen in the midst of the world of the Middle Ages. The two parties could not avoid coming to blows: struggle was at hand. It was the mildest champion of literature, an old man drawing near the close of his peaceful career, who was to begin the conflict.

In order that the truth might prove triumphant, it was necessary first that the weapons by which she was to conquer should be brought forth from the arsenals where they had lain buried for ages. These weapons were the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. It was necessary to revive in Christendom the love and the study of sacred Greek and Hebrew learning. The man whom the providence of God selected for this task was named John Reuchlin.

The sweet voice of a child had been remarked in the choir of the church at Pforzheim, and had attracted the notice of the Margrave of Baden. It was that of John Reuchlin, a boy of agreeable

manners and lively disposition, the son of a worthy burgess of that town. The margrave soon showed him especial favor, and made choice of him in 1473 to accompany his son Frederick to the university of Paris.

The son of the usher of Pforzheim, in transports of joy, arrived with the prince at this school, then the most celebrated of the West. Here he found the Spartan Hermonymos and John Wessel, the light of the world; and had now an opportunity of studying Greek and Hebrew under able masters of which languages there was at that time no professor in Germany, and of which he was one day to be the restorer in the home of the Reformation.

The young and indigent German transcribed for richer students the rhapsodies of Homer and the orations of Isocrates, gaining thus the means of prosecuting his own studies and of purchasing books.

But he heard other things from the mouth of Wessel, that made a deep impression on his mind.

“The popes may err. All human satisfactions are blasphemy against Christ, who has reconciled and completely justified the human race. To God alone belongs the power of giving plenary absolution.

It is not necessary to confess our sins to the priest. There is no purgatory unless it be God himself, who is a devouring fire, and who cleanseth from all impurity.” Reuchlin had barely attained the age of twenty years, when he taught philosophy and Greek and Latin at Basle; and — what then passed for a miracle — a German was heard speaking Greek.

The partisans of Rome began to feel uneasy, when they saw these generous spirits searching into the ancient treasures. “The Romans make wry faces,” said Reuchlin, “and cry out, pretending that all these literary pursuits are contrary to the Romish piety, because the Greeks are schismatics. Oh! what toil and suffering must be undergone to restore wisdom and learning to Germany!” Not long after, Eberhard of Wurtemberg invited Reuchlin to Tubingen to adorn that rising

university. In, he took him with him into Italy.

Chalcondylas, Aurispa, and John Pico of Mirandola, were his friends and companions at Florence. At Rome, when Eberhard had a solemn audience of the pope, surrounded by his cardinals, Reuchlin delivered an address in such pure and elegant Latinity, that the assembly, who expected nothing of the kind from a barbarous German, was filled with astonishment, and the pontiff exclaimed: “This man certainly deserves to rank with the best orators of France and Italy.” Ten years later Reuchlin was compelled to take refuge at Heidelberg, at the court of the Elector Philip, to escape the vengeance of Eberhard’s successor. Philip, in conjunction with John of Dalberg, bishop of Worms, his friend and chancellor, endeavored to diffuse the light that was beginning to dawn in every part of Germany. Dalberg had founded a library, which was open to all the learned. On this new stage Reuchlin made great efforts to destroy the barbarism of his countrymen.

Having been sent by the elector in 1498 on an

important mission to Rome, he employed all the time and money he could spare, either in improving himself in the Hebrew language under the learned Israelite, Abdias Sphorna, or in purchasing all the Greek and Hebrew manuscripts he could find, with a view of employing them as so many torches to increase in his own country the light which was already beginning to appear.

Argyropolos, an illustrious Greek, was then at Rome explaining to a numerous auditory the ancient marvels of his national literature. The learned ambassador proceeded with his attendants to the hall where this doctor was lecturing, and on his entrance saluted the master, and deplored the misfortunes of Greece, then expiring under the blows of the Ottomans.

The astonished scholar asked his visiter, “Where do you come from, and do you understand Greek?” Reuchlin answered, “I am a German, and I am not entirely ignorant of your language.” At the request of Argyropolos, he read and explained a passage from Thucydides, which the professor

happened to have before him. Upon this Argyropolos, struck with astonishment and grief, exclaimed, “Alas! alas! the fugitive and exiled Greece has gone to hide herself beyond the Alps!” It was thus that the sons of barbarous Germany and of ancient and learned Greece met in the palaces of Rome; thus the East and the West embraced in this resort of the world, and the one poured into the lap of the other those intellectual treasures which it had snatched from the barbarism of the Ottomans. God, whenever his plans require it, brings together in an instant, by some great catastrophe, the things which seemed destined to remain for ever separated.

Reuchlin, on his return to Germany, was able to take up his residence again at Wurtemberg. It was at this time he accomplished those labors that were so useful to Luther and to the Reformation. This man, who, as Count Palatine, occupied a distinguished place in the empire, and who, as philosopher, contributed to lower Aristotle and exalt Plato, drew up a Latin dictionary which superseded those of the Schoolmen; wrote a Greek grammar which greatly facilitated the study of that

language; translated and explained the Penitential Psalms; corrected the Vulgate; and — which is his chief merit and glory — was the first to publish in Germany a Hebrew grammar and dictionary. Reuchlin by this labor reopened the long-sealed books of the old covenant, and thus raised, as he says himself, “a monument more durable than brass.” But Reuchlin endeavored to promote the cause to truth as much by his life as by his writings. By his lofty stature, his commanding person, and his engaging address, he immediately gained the confidence of all with whom he had to deal. His thirst for knowledge was only equalled by his zeal in communicating what he had learnt. He spared neither money nor labor to introduce into Germany the editions of the classic writers as they issued from the Italian presses; and thus the usher’s son did more to enlighten his fellow-countrymen than rich corporations or mighty princes. His influence over youth was very extensive; and who can estimate all that the Reformation owes to him in that respect? We will mention only one instance. His cousin, a young man, the son of a skillful and celebrated armorer named Schwarzerd, came to

reside with his sister Elisabeth, in order to study under his direction. Reuchlin, delighted at beholding the genius and industry of his youthful scholar, adopted him as his son. Good advice, presents of books, example, — nothing was spared to make his relative useful to the Church and to his country. He was charmed at seeing the work prosper under his eyes; and finding the German name of Schwarzerd too harsh, he translated it into Greek, according to the fashion of the times, and named the young student Melancthon. This was the illustrious friend of Luther.

But grammatical studies could not satisfy Reuchlin. Imitating his Jewish teachers, he began to study the mystic meaning of the Word. “God is a spirit,” said he, “the Word is a breath, man breathes, God is the Word. The names which He has given to himself are an echo of eternity.” He thought with the Cabalists that man can ascend from symbol to symbol, and from form to form to the last and purest of all forms, — to that which regulates the kingdom of the spirit. While Reuchlin was bewildering himself in these peaceful and

abstract researches, the hostility of the schoolmen, suddenly and very much against his will, forced him into a violent contest that was one of the preludes to the Reformation.

There dwelt at Cologne one Pfefferkorn, a baptized rabbi, and intimately connected with the inquisitor Hochstraten. This man and the Dominicans solicited and obtained from the Emperor Maximilian — perhaps with very good intentions — an order by virtue of which the Jews were to bring all their Hebrew books (the Bible only excepted) to the town-hall of the place in which they resided. Here these writings were to be burnt. The motive put forward was, that they were full of blasphemies against Jesus Christ.

It must be acknowledged they were at least full of absurdities, and that the Jews themselves would have been no great losers by the proposed measure.

The emperor invited Reuchlin to give his opinion upon these works. The learned doctor particularly singled out the books written against

Christianity, leaving them to their destined fate; but he endeavored to save the rest. “The best way to convert the Israelites,” added he, “would be to establish two professors of the Hebrew language in each university, who should teach the theologians to read the Bible in Hebrew, and thus to refute the Jewish doctors.” In consequence of this advice the Jews had their books restored to them.

The proselyte and the inquisitor, like hungry ravens who see their prey escaping them, raised a furious clamor. They picked out different passages from Reuchlin’s work, perverted their meaning, declared the author a heretic, accused him of a secret inclination to Judaism, and threatened him with the dungeons of the Inquisition. Reuchlin at first gave way to alarm; but as these men became daily more insolent, and prescribed disgraceful conditions, he published in 1513 a “Defence against his Cologne Slanderers,” in which he described the whole party in the liveliest colors.

The Dominicans swore to be avenged, and hoped by a stroke of authority, to uphold their

tottering power. Hochstraten had a tribunal formed at Mentz against Reuchlin, and the writings of this learned man were committed to the flames. Then the innovators, the masters and disciples of the new school, feeling themselves all attacked in the person of Reuchlin, rose up like one man. The times were changed: Germany and literature were not Spain and the Inquisition. This great literary movement had called a public opinion into existence. Even the superior clergy were almost entirely gained over to it. Reuchlin appealed to Leo X. This pope, who was no friend to the ignorant and fanatical monks, referred the whole matter to the Bishop of Spires, who declared Reuchlin innocent, and condemned the monks to pay the expenses of the investigation. The Dominicans, those stanch supporters of the Papacy, had recourse in their exasperation to the infallible decrees of Rome; and Leo X, not knowing how to act between these two hostile powers, issued a mandate de supersedendo.

This union of learning with faith is one of the features of the Reformation, and distinguished it

both from the establishment of Christianity and from the religious revivals of the present day. The Christians contemporary with the Apostles had against them all the refinement of their age; and, with very few exceptions, it is the same with those of our times. The majority of learned men were with the reformers. Even public opinion was favorable to them. The work thus gained in extent; but perhaps it lost in depth.

Luther, acknowledging all that Reuchlin had done, wrote to him shortly after his victory over the Dominicans: “The Lord has been at work in you, that the light of Holy Scripture might begin to shine in that Germany where for so many ages, alas! it was not only stifled but entirely extinct.”

Chapter 8

Erasmus

One man — the great writer of the opposition at the beginning of the sixteenth century — had already appeared, who considered it as the grand affair of his life to attack the doctrines of the schools and of the convents.

Reuchlin was not twelve years old when this great genius of the age was born. A man of no small vivacity and wit, named Gerard, a native of Gouda in the Low Countries, loved a physician’s daughter. The principles of Christianity did not govern his life, or at least his passions silenced them. His parents and his nine brothers urged him to embrace a monastic life. He fled from his home, leaving the object of his affections on the point of becoming a mother, and repaired to Rome. The frail Margaret gave birth to a son. Gerard was not informed of it; and some time after he received from his parents the intelligence that she whom he had loved was no more.

Overwhelmed with grief, he entered the priesthood, and devoted himself entirely to the service of God. He returned to Holland: Margaret was still living! She would not marry another, and Gerard remained faithful to his sacerdotal vows. Their affection was concentrated on their son. His mother had taken the tenderest care of him: the father, after his return, sent him to school, although he was only four years old. He was not yet thirteen, when his teacher, Sinthemius of Deventer, one day embraced him with rapture, exclaiming, “This child will attain the highest pinnacle of learning!

It was Erasmus of Rotterdam. About this time his mother died, and not long after his broken-hearted father followed her to the grave.

The youthful Erasmus was now alone. He entertained the greatest dislike for a monastic life, which his guardians urged him to embrace, but to which, from his very birth, we might say, he had been opposed. At last, he was persuaded to enter a convent of canons regular, and scarcely had he

done so when he felt himself oppressed by the weight of his vows. He recovered a little liberty, and we soon find him at the court of the Archbishop of Cambray, and somewhat later at the university of Paris. He there pursued his studies in extreme poverty, but with the most indefatigable industry. As soon as he could procure any money, he employed it in purchasing — first, Greek works, and then clothes.

Frequently did the indigent Hollander solicit in vain the generosity of his protectors; and hence, in afterlife, it was his greatest delight to furnish the means of support to youthful but poor students. Engaged without intermission in the pursuit of truth and of knowledge, he reluctantly assisted in the scholastic disputes, and shrank from the study of theology, lest he should discover any errors in it, and be in consequence denounced as a heretic.

It was at this period that Erasmus became conscious of his powers. In the study of the ancients he acquired a correctness and elegance of style, that placed him far above the most eminent

scholars of Paris. He began to teach; and thus gained powerful friends. He published some writings, and was rewarded by admiration and applause. He knew the public taste, and shaking off the last ties of the schools and of the cloister, he devoted himself entirely to literature, displaying in all his writings those shrewd observations, that clear, lively, and enlightened wit which at once amuse and instruct.

The habit of application, which he contracted at this period, clung to him all his life: even in his journeys, which were usually on horseback, he was not idle. He used to compose on the road, while riding across the country, and as soon as he reached the inn, committed his thoughts to writing. It was thus he composed his celebrated Praise of Folly, in a journey from Italy to England. Erasmus early acquired a great reputation among the learned: but the exasperated monks vowed deadly vengeance against him. Courted by princes, he was inexhaustible in finding excuses to escape from their invitations. He preferred gaining his living with the printer Frobenius by correcting books, to

living surrounded with luxury and favors in the splendid courts of Charles V, Henry VIII, or Francis I, or to encircling his head with the cardinal's hat that was offered him. Henry the Eighth having ascended the throne in 1509, Lord Mountjoy invited Erasmus, who had already been in England, to come and cultivate literature under the scepter of their Octavius. In 1510 he lectured at Cambridge, maintaining with Archbishop Warham, John Colet, and Sir Thomas More, those friendly relations which continued until their death.

In 1516 he visited Basle, where he took up his abode in 1521.

What was his influence on the Reformation?

It has been overrated by one party, and depreciated by another. Erasmus never was, and never could have been a reformer; but he prepared the way for others. Not only did he diffuse over his age a love of learning, and a spirit of inquiry and examination that led others much farther than he went himself; — but still more under the protection

of great prelates and powerful princes, he was able to unveil and combat the vices of the Church by the most cutting satires.

Erasmus, in fact, attacked the monks and the prevailing abuses in two ways. He first adopted a popular method. This fair little man, whose halfclosed blue eyes keenly observed all that was passing, — on whose lips was ever a slight sarcastic smile, — whose manner was timid and embarrassed, — and whom, it seemed, that a puff of wind would blow down, — scattered in every direction his elegant and biting sarcasms against the theology and devotion of his age. His natural character and the events of his life had rendered this disposition habitual. Even in those writings where we should have least expected it, his sarcastic humor suddenly breaks out, and he immolated, as with needle-points, those schoolmen and those ignorant monks against whom he had declared war.

There are many points of resemblance between Voltaire and Erasmus.

Preceding authors had already popularized the idea of that element of folly which has crept into all the opinions and actions of human life. Erasmus seized upon it, and introduced Folly in her own person, Moria, daughter of Plutus, born in the Fortunate Isles, fed on drunkenness and impertinence, and queen of a powerful empire. She gives a description of it. She depicts successively all the states in the world that belong to her, but she dwells particularly on the churchmen, who will not acknowledge her benefits, though she loads them with her favors. She overwhelms with her gibes and sarcasms that labyrinth of dialectics in which the theologians had bewildered themselves, and those extravagant syllogisms, by which they pretended to support the Church. She unveils the disorders, ignorance, filthy habits, and absurdities of the monks.

“They all belong to me,” says she, “those folks whose greatest pleasure is in relating miracles, or listening to marvelous lies, and who makes use of them in an especial manner to beguile the dulness

of others, and to fill their own purses (I speak particularly of priests and preachers)! In the same category are those who enjoy the foolish but sweet persuasion that if they chance to see a piece of wood or a picture representing Polyphemus or Christopher, they will not die that day.....” “Alas! what follies,” continues Moria; “I am almost ashamed of them myself! Do we not see every country claiming its peculiar saint? Each trouble has its saint, and every saint his candle. This cures the toothache; that assists women in childbed; a third restores what a thief has stolen; a fourth preserves you in shipwreck; and a fifth protects your flocks. There are some who have many virtues at once, and especially the Virgin-mother of God, in whom the people place more confidence than in her Son. ....If in the midst of all these mummeries some wise man should rise and give utterance to these harsh truths: ‘You shall not perish miserably if you live like Christians; — you shall redeem your sins, if to your alms you add repentance, tears, watchings, prayer, fasting, and a complete change in your way of life; — this saint will protect you, if you imitate his conduct;’ — If, I

say, some wise man should charitably utter these things in their ears, oh! of what happiness would he not rob their souls, and into what trouble, what distress would he not plunge them!.....The mind of man is so constituted that imposture has more hold upon it than truth. If there is one saint more apocryphal than another — a St. George, St. Christopher, or St. Barbara — you will see him worshipped with greater fervency that St. Peter, St. Paul, or even than Christ himself.” But Moria does not stop here: she attacks the bishops “who run more after gold than after souls, and who think they have done enough for Jesus Christ, when they take their seats complacently and with theatrical pomp, like Holy Fathers to whom adoration belongs, and utter blessings or anathemas.” The daughter of the Fortunate Isles even ventures to attack the Court of Rome and the pope himself, who, passing his time in amusements, leaves the duties of his ministry to St. Peter and St. Paul.

“Can there be any greater enemies to the Church than these unholy pontiffs, who by their silence allow Jesus Christ to be forgotten; who

bind him by their mercenary regulations; who falsify his doctrine by forced interpretations; and crucify him a second time by their scandalous lives?" Holbein added the most grotesque illustrations to the Praise of Folly, in which the pope figured with his triple crown. Perhaps no work has ever been so thoroughly adapted to the wants of the age. It is impossible to describe the impression this little book produced throughout Christendom.

Twenty-seven editions appeared in the life-time of Erasmus: it was translated into every European language, and contributed more than any other to confirm the anti-sacerdotal tendency of the age.

But to the popular attack of sarcasm Erasmus united science and learning.

The study of Greek and Latin literature had opened a new prospect to the modern genius that was beginning to awaken from its slumber in Europe.

Erasmus eagerly embraced the idea of the Italians that the sciences ought to be studied in the schools of the ancients, and that, laying aside the inadequate and absurd works that had hitherto been in use, men should study geography in Strabo, medicine in Hippocrates, philosophy in Plato, mythology in Ovid, and natural history in Pliny. But he went a step further, and it was the step of a giant, and must necessarily have led to the discovery of a new world of greater importance to the interests of humanity than that which Columbus had recently added to the old.

Erasmus, following out his principle, required that men should no longer study theology in Scotus and Aquinas, but go and learn it in the writings of the Fathers of the Church, and above all in the New Testament. He showed that they must not even rest contented with the Vulgate, which swarmed with errors; and he rendered an incalculable service to truth by publishing his critical edition of the Greek text of the New Testament — a text as little known in the West as if it had never existed. This work appeared at Basle in 1516, one year before the

Reformation. Erasmus thus did for the New Testament what Reuchlin had done for the Old.

Henceforward divines were able to read the Word of God in the original languages, and at a later period to recognize the purity of the Reformed doctrines.

“It is my desire,” said Erasmus, on publishing his New Testament, “to lead back that cold disputer of words, styled theology, to its real fountain.

Would to God that this work may bear as much fruit to Christianity as it has cost me toil and application!” This wish was realized. In vain did the monks cry out, “He presumes to correct the Holy Ghost!” The New Testament of Erasmus gave out a bright flash of light. His paraphrases on the Epistles, and on the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. John; his editions of Cyprian and Jerome; his translations of Origen, Athanasius, and Chrysostom; his Principles of True Theology, his Preacher, and his Commentaries on various Psalms, contributed powerfully to diffuse a taste

for the Word of God and for pure theology. The result of his labors even went beyond his intentions. Reuchlin and Erasmus gave the Bible to the learned; Luther, to the people.

Erasmus did still more: by his restoration of the New Testament, he restored what that revelation taught. “The most exalted aim in the revival of philosophical studies,” said he, “will be to obtain a knowledge of the pure and simple Christianity of the Bible.” A noble sentiment! and would to God that the organs of our modern philosophy understood their mission as well as he did! “I am firmly resolved,” said he again, “to die in the study of the Scriptures; in them are all my joy and all my peace.” “The sum of all christian philosophy,” said he on another occasion, “amounts to this: — to place all our hopes in God alone, who by his free grace, without any merit of our own, gives us everything through Christ Jesus; to know that we are redeemed by the death of his Son; to be dead to worldly lusts; and to walk in conformity with his doctrine and example, not only injuring no man, but doing good to all; to support our trials patiently

in the hope of a future reward; and finally, to claim no merit to ourselves on account of our virtues, but to give thanks to God for all our strength and for all our works.

This is what should be instilled into man, until it becomes a second nature." Then raising his voice against that mass of church-regulations about dress, fasting, feast-days, vows, marriage, and confession, which oppressed the people and enriched the priests, Erasmus exclaims: "In the churches they scarcely ever think of explaining the Gospel. The greater part of their sermons must be drawn up to please the commissaries of indulgences. The most holy doctrine of Christ must be suppressed or perverted to their profit. There is no longer any hope of cure, unless Christ himself should turn the hearts of rulers and of pontiffs, and excite them to seek for real piety." The writings of Erasmus followed one another in rapid succession. He labored unceasingly, and his works were read just as they came from his pen. This animation, this native energy, this intellect so rich and so delicate, so witty and so bold, that was poured without any

reserve in such copious streams upon his contemporaries, led away and enchanted the immense public who devoured the works of the philosopher of Rotterdam. He soon became the most influential man in Christendom, and crowns and pensions were showered upon him from every side.

If we cast our eyes on the great revolution that somewhat later renewed the Church, we cannot help acknowledging that Erasmus served as a bridge to many minds. Numbers who would have been alarmed by the evangelical truths presented in all their strength and purity, allowed themselves to be drawn along by him, and ultimately became the most zealous partisans of the Reformation.

But the very circumstances that fitted him for the work of preparation, disqualified him for its accomplishment.

“Erasmus is very capable of exposing error,” said Luther, “but he knows not how to teach the truth.” The Gospel of Christ was not the fire at

which he kindled and sustained his energy, — the center whence his activity radiated. He was in an eminent degree a man of learning, and only in consequence of that was he a Christian. He was too much the slave of vanity to acquire a decided influence over his age. He anxiously calculated the result that each step he took might have upon his reputation. There was nothing he liked better than to talk about himself and his fame. “The pope,” wrote he with a childish vanity to an intimate friend, at the period when he declared himself the opponent of Luther, “the pope has sent me a diploma full of kindness and honorable testimonials. His secretary declares that this in an unprecedented honor, and that the pope dictated every word himself.” Erasmus and Luther, viewed in connection with the “Reformation, are the representatives of two great ideas, — of two great parties in their age, and indeed in every age. The one composed of men of timid prudence; the other, of men of resolution and courage. These two parties were in existence at that epoch, and they are personified in their illustrious chiefs.

The men of prudence thought that the study of theological science would gradually bring about a reformation of the Church, and that, too, without violence. The men of action thought that the diffusion of more correct ideas among the learned would not put an end to the superstitions of the people, and that the correction of this or of that abuse, so long as the whole life of the Church was not renewed, would be of little effect.

“A disadvantageous peace,” Erasmus used to say, “is better than the most righteous war.” He thought — and how many Erasmuses have lived since, and are living even in our own days! he thought that a reformation which might shake the Church would endanger its overthrow; he witnessed with alarm men’s passions aroused into activity; evil everywhere mixed up with the little good that might be effected; existing institutions destroyed without the possibility of others being set up in their place; and the vessel of the Church, leaking on every side, at last swallowed up by the tempest. “Those who bring the sea into new beds,” said he, “often attempt a work that deceives their

expectations; for the terrible element, once let in, does not go where they would with it, but rushes whithersoever it pleases, and causes great devastation." "Be that as it may," added he, "let troubles be everywhere avoided!

It is better to put up with ungodly princes than to increase the evil by any change." But the courageous portion of his contemporaries were prepared with an answer. History had sufficiently proved that a free exposition of the truth and a decided struggle against falsehood could alone ensure the victory. If they had temporized, the artifices of policy and the wiles of the papal court would have extinguished the truth in its first glimmerings. Had not conciliatory measures been employed for ages? Had not council after council been convoked to reform the Church? All had been unavailing.

Why now pretend to repeat an experiment that had so often failed?

Undoubtedly a thorough reform could not be

accomplished without violence. But when has anything good or great ever appeared among men without causing some agitation? Would not this fear of seeing evil mingled with good, even had it been reasonable, have checked the noblest and the holiest undertakings? We must not fear the evil that may arise out of a great agitation, but we must take courage to resist and to overcome it.

Is there not besides an essential difference between the commotion originating in human passions, and that which emanates from the Spirit of God? One shakes society, the other strengthens it. What an error to imagine with Erasmus that in the then existing state of Christendom, — with that mixture of contrary elements, of truth and falsehood, life and death — a violent collision could be prevented! As well strive to close the crater of Vesuvius when the angry elements are already warring in its bosom! The Middle Ages had seen more than one violent commotion, when the sky was less threatening with storms than at the time of the Reformation. Men had not then to think of checking and of repressing, but of directing and

guiding.

Who can tell what frightful ruin might not have occurred if the Reformation had not burst forth? Society, the prey of a thousand elements of destruction, destitute of any regenerating or conservative qualities, would have been terribly convulsed. Certainly this would have really been a reform in Erasmus's fashion, and such as many moderate but timid men of our days still dream of, which would have overturned christian society.

The people, wanting that knowledge and that piety which the Reformation brought down even to the lowest ranks, abandoned to their violent passions, and to a restless spirit of revolt, would have been let loose, like a furious and exasperated wild beast, whose rage no chains can any longer control.

The Reformation was no other than an interposition of the Spirit of God among men, — a regulating principle that God sent upon earth. It is true that it might stir up the fermenting elements

hidden in the heart of man; but God overruled them. The evangelical doctrines, the truth of God, penetrating the masses of the people, destroyed what was destined to perish, but everywhere strengthened what ought to be maintained. The effect of the Reformation on society was to reconstruct; prejudice alone could say that it was an instrument of destruction. It has been said with reason, with reference to the work of reform, that "the ploughshare might as well think that it injures the earth it breaks up, while it is only fertilizing it." The leading principle of Erasmus was: "Give light, and the darkness will disappear of itself." This principle is good, and Luther acted upon it. But when the enemies of the light endeavor to extinguish it, or to wrest the torch from the hand of him who bears it, must we (for the sake of peace) allow him to do so? must we not resist the wicked?

Erasmus was deficient in courage. Now, that quality is as indispensable to effect a reformation as to take a town. There was much timidity in his character. From his early youth he trembled at the name of death. He took the most extraordinary care

of his health. He spared no sacrifice to remove from a place in which a contagious malady was reigning. The desire of enjoying the comforts of life exceeded even his vanity, and this was his motive for rejecting more than one brilliant offer.

He had, therefore, no claims to the character of a reformer. “If the corrupted morals of the court of Rome call for a prompt and vigorous remedy, that is no business of mine,” said he, “nor of those who are like me.” He had not that strength of faith which animated Luther. While the latter was ever prepared to lay down his life for the truth, Erasmus candidly observed, “Let others aspire the martyrdom: as for me, I do not think myself worthy of such an honor. I fear that if any disturbance were to arise, I should imitate Peter in his fall.” By his conversation and by his writings Erasmus had prepared the way for the Reformation more than any other man; and yet he trembled when he saw the approach of that very tempest which he himself had raised. He would have given anything to restore the calm of former times, even with all its dense vapors. But it was too late: the dike was

broken. It was no longer in man's power to arrest the flood that was at once to cleanse and fertilize the world. Erasmus was powerful as God's instrument; when he ceased to be that, he was nothing.

Ultimately Erasmus knew not what party to adopt. None pleased him, and he feared all. "It is dangerous to speak," said he, "and it is dangerous to be silent." In every great religious movement there will be found these wavering characters, — respectable on many accounts, but injurious to the truth, and who, from their unwillingness to displease any, offend all.

What would have become of the Truth, had not God raised up more courageous champions than Erasmus? Listen to the advice he gives Viglius Zuichem, who was afterwards president of the supreme court at Brussels, as to the manner in which he should behave towards the sectarians — for thus he had already begun to denominate the Reformers: "My friendship for you leads me to desire that you will keep aloof from the contagion

of the sects, and that you will give them no opportunity of saying, Zuichem is become one of us. If you approve of their teaching, you should at least dissemble, and, above all, avoid discussions with them. A lawyer should finesse with these people, as the dying man did with the devil, who asked him, What do you believe? The poor man, fearful of being caught in some heresy, if he should make a confession of his faith, replied, What the Church believes. The devil demanded, And what does the Church believe?

— What I believe. — Once more he was questioned, What do you believe?

— And the expiring man answered once more, What the Church believes!" Thus Duke George of Saxony, Luther's mortal enemy, having received an equivocal answer to a question he had put to Erasmus, said to him: "My dear Erasmus, wash me the fur without wetting it!" Secundus Curio, in one of his works, describes two heavens — the papal and the christian. He found Erasmus in neither, but discovered him revolving between both in never-

ending orbits.

Such was Erasmus. He needed that inward emancipation which alone gives perfect liberty. How different would he have been had he abandoned self, and sacrificed all for truth! But after having endeavored to effect certain reforms with the approbation of the heads of the Church; after having deserted the Reformation for Rome, when he saw that these two things could not go hand in hand; — he lost ground with all parties. On the one side, his recantations could not repress the anger of the fanatical partisans of the papacy: they felt all the evil he had done them, and would not pardon him. Furious monks loaded him with abuse from the pulpits: they called him a second Lucian — a fox that had laid waste the Lord's vineyard. A doctor of Constance had hung the portrait of Erasmus in his study, that he might be able at any moment to spit in his face. — But, on the other hand, Erasmus, deserting the standard of the Gospel, lost the affection and esteem of the noblest men of the age in which he lived, and was forced to renounce, there can be little doubt, those heavenly

consolations which God sheds in the heart of those who act as good soldiers of Christ. This at least seems to be indicated by those bitter tears, those painful vigils, that broken sleep, that tasteless food, that loathing of the study of the Muses (formerly his only consolation), those saddened features, that pale face, those sorrowful and downcast eyes, that hatred of existence which he calls “a cruel life,” and those longings after death, which he describes to his friends. Unhappy Erasmus!

The enemies of Erasmus went, in my opinion, a little beyond the truth, when they exclaimed on Luther’s appearance: “Erasmus laid the egg, and Luther hatched it.”

Chapter 9

The Nobility

The same symptoms of regeneration that we have seen among princes, bishops, and learned men, were also found among men of the world, — among nobles, knights, and warriors. The German nobility played an important part in the Reformation. Several of the most illustrious sons of Germany formed a close alliance with the men of letters, and inflamed by an ardent, frequently by an excessive zeal, they strove to deliver their country from the Roman yoke.

Various causes contributed to raise up friends to the Reformation among the ranks of the nobles. Some having frequented the universities, had there received into their bosoms the fire with which the learned were animated.

Others, brought up in generous sentiments, had hearts predisposed to receive the glorious lessons of the Gospel. Many discovered in the Reformation

a certain chivalrous character that fascinated them and carried them along with it. And others, we must freely acknowledge, were offended with the clergy, who, in the reign of Maximilian, had powerfully contributed to deprive them of their ancient independence, and bring them under subjection to their princes. They were full of enthusiasm, and looked upon the Reformation as the prelude to a great political renovation; they saw in imagination the empire emerging with new splendor from this crisis, and hailed a better state, brilliant with the purest glory, that was on the eve of being established in the world, not less by the swords of the knights than by the Word of God. Ulrich of Hutten, who has been called the German Demosthenes, on account of his philippics against the Papacy, forms, as it were, the link that unites the knights with the men of letters. He distinguished himself by his writings not less than by his sword. Descended from an ancient Franconian family, he was sent at the age of eleven years to the convent of Foulda, in which he was to become a monk. But Ulrich, who felt no inclination for this profession, ran away from the convent at

sixteen, and repaired to the university of Cologne, where he devoted himself to the study of languages and poetry. Somewhat later he led a wandering life, and was present, as a common soldier at the siege of Padua in 1513, beheld Rome and all her scandalous abuses, and there sharpened those arrows which he afterwards discharged against her.

On his return to Germany, Hutten composed a treatise against Rome, entitled “The Roman Trinity.” In this work he unveils the disorders of the papal court, and points out the necessity of putting an end to her tyranny by force. “There are three things,” says a traveler named Vadiscus, who figures in the treatise, — “there are three things that are usually brought away from Rome: a bad conscience, a disordered stomach, and an empty purse. There are three things in which Rome does not believe: the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the dead, and hell. There are three things in which Rome traffics: the grace of Christ, ecclesiastical dignities, and women.” The publication of this work compelled Hutten to leave the court of the Archbishop of Mentz, where he

had composed it.

Reuchlin’s affair with the Dominicans was the signal that brought together all the men of letters, magistrates, and nobles, who were opposed to the monks. The defeat of the inquisitors, who, it was said, had escaped a definite and absolute condemnation only by means of bribery and intrigue, had emboldened their adversaries. Councillors of the empire; patricians of the most considerable cities, — Pickheimer of Nuremberg, Peutinger of Augsburg, and Stuss of Cologne; distinguished preachers, such as Capito and Oecolampadius; doctors of medicine and historians; all the literary men, orators, and poets, at whose head shone Ulrich of Hutten, composed that army of Reuchlinists, of which a list was even published. The most remarkable production of this learned league was the famous popular satire entitled — The Letters of Obscure Men. The principal authors of this work were Hutten, and Crotus Robianus, one of his college friends; but it is hard to say which of them first conceived the idea, even if it did not originate with the learned

printer Angst, and if Hutten took any share in the first part of the work. Several humanists, assembled in the fortress of Ebernburg, appear to have contributed to the second. It is a bold sketch, a caricature often too rudely colored, but full of truth and strength, of striking resemblance, and in characters of fire. Its effect was prodigious.

The monks, the adversaries of Reuchlin, the supposed writers of these letters, discuss the affairs of the day and theological matters after their own fashion and in barbarous latinity. They address the silliest and most useless questions to their correspondent Ortuin Gratius, professor at Cologne, and a friend of Pfefferkorn. With the most artless simplicity they betray their gross ignorance, incredulity, and superstition; their low and vulgar spirit; the coarse gluttony by which they make a god of their bellies; and at the same time their pride, and fanatical, persecuting zeal. They relate many of their droll adventures, of their excesses and profligacy, with various scandalous incidents in the lives of Hochstraten, Pfefferkorn, and other chiefs of their party. The tone of these

letters — at one time hypocritical, at another quite childish — gives them a very comic effect: and yet the whole is so natural, that the English Dominicans and Franciscans received the work with the greatest approbation, and thought it really composed on the principles and in the defense of their orders. A certain prior of Brabant, in his credulous simplicity, even purchased a great number of copies, and sent them as presents to the most distinguished of the Dominicans. The monks, more and more exasperated, applied to the pope for a severe bull against all who should dare to read these letters; but Leo X would not grant their request. They were forced to bear with the general ridicule, and to smother their anger. No work ever inflicted a more terrible blow on these supporters of the Papacy. But it was not by satire and by jests that the Gospel was to triumph. Had men continued walking in this path; had the Reformation had recourse to the jeering spirit of the world, instead of attacking error with the arms of God, its cause would have been lost. Luther boldly condemned these satires. One of his friends having sent him The Tenour of Pasquin’s Supplication, he replied,

“The nonsense you have forwarded me seems to have been composed by an illregulated mind. I have communicated it to a circle of friends, and all have come to the same conclusion.” And speaking of the same work, he writes to another correspondent: “This Supplication appears to me to have been written by the author of the Letters of Obscure Men. I approve of his design, but not of his work, since he cannot refrain from insults and abuse.” This judgment is severe, but it shows Luther’s disposition, and how superior he was to his contemporaries. We must add, however, that he did not always follow such wise maxims.

Ulrich having been compelled to resign the protection of the Archbishop of Mentz, sought that of Charles V, who was then at variance with the pope.

He accordingly repaired to Brussels, where the emperor was holding his court. But far from obtaining anything, he learnt that the pope had called upon Charles to send him bound hand and foot to Rome. The inquisitor Hochstraten,

Reuchlin’s persecutor was one of those whom Leo X had charged to bring him to trial. Ulrich quitted Brabant in indignation at such a request having been made to the emperor. He had scarcely left Brussels, when he met Hochstraten on the highroad. The terrified inquisitor fell on his knees,a nd commended his soul to God and the saints. “No!” said the knight, “I will not soil my weapon with thy blood!” He gave him a few strokes with the flat of his sword, and allowed him to proceed in peace.

Hutten took refuge in the castle of Ebernburg, where Francis of Sickingen offered an asylum to all who were persecuted by the ultra-montanists. It was here that his burning zeal for the emancipation of his country dictated those remarkable letters which he addressed to Charles V, to the Elector Frederick, of Saxony, to Albert, archbishop of Mentz, and to the princes and nobles, — letters that place him in the foremost ranks of authorship.

Here, too, he composed all those works intended to be read and understood by the people,

and which inspired all the German states with horror of Rome, and with the love of liberty Ardently devoted to the cause of the Reformation, his design was to lead the nobles to take up arms in favor of the Gospel, and to fall with the sword upon that Rome which Luther aimed at destroying solely by the Word of God and by the invincible power of the truth.

Yet amidst all this warlike enthusiasm, we are charmed at finding in Hutten mild and delicate sentiments. On the death of his parents, he made over to his brothers all the family property, although he was the eldest son, and even begged them not to write to him or send him any money, lest, notwithstanding their innocence, they should be exposed to suffer by the malice of his enemies, and fall with him into the pit.

If Truth cannot acknowledge Hutten as one of her children, for her walk is ever with holiness of life and charity of heart, she will at least accord him honorable mention as one of the most formidable antagonists of error. The same may be

said of Francis of Sickingen, his illustrious friend and protector. This noble knight, whom many of his contemporaries judged worthy of the imperial crown, shines in the first rank among those warriors who were the adversaries of Rome. Although delighting in the uproar of battle, he was filled with an ardent love of learning and with veneration for its professors. When at the head of an army that menaced Wurtemberg, he gave orders that, in case Stuttgard should be taken by assault, the house and property of that great scholar, John Reuchlin, should be spared. Sickingen afterwards invited him to his camp, and embracing him, offered to support him in his quarrel with the monks of Cologne. For a long time chivalry had prided itself on despising literature.

The epoch whose history we are retracing presents to us a new spectacle.

Under the weighty cuirasses of the Huttens and Sickingens we perceive that intellectual movement which was beginning to make itself felt in every quarter. The first fruits that the Reformation gave

to the world were warriors that were the friends of the peaceful arts.

Hutten, who on his return from Brussels had taken refuge in the castle of Sickingen, invited the worthy knight to study the evangelical doctrines, and explained to him the foundations on which they rest. “And is there any man,” asked he in astonishment, “who dares attempt to overthrow such an edifice?...Who could do it?...” Many individuals, who were afterwards celebrated as reformers, found an asylum in his castle; among others, Martin Bucer, Aquila, Schwebel, and Oecolampadius, so that Hutten with justice used to call Ebernburg “the resting-place of the righteous.” It was the duty of Oecolampadius to preach daily in the castle. The warriors who were there assembled, at last grew weary of hearing so much said about the meek virtues of Christianity: the sermons appeared to them too long, however brief Oecolampadius endeavored to be. They repaired, it is true, almost every day to the church, but it was for little else than to hear the benediction and to repeat a short prayer, so that Oecolampadius used

to exclaim: “Alas! the Word of God is sown here upon stony ground!” Erelong Sickingen, wishing to serve the cause of truth after his own fashion, declared war against the Archbishop of Treves, “in order,” as he said, “to open a door for the Gospel.” In vain did Luther, who had already appeared, strive to dissuade him from it: he attacked Treves with 5000 horse and 1000 foot. The courageous archbishop, with the aid of the Elector Palatine and the Landgrave of Hesse, compelled him to retire. In the following spring the allied princes attacked him in his castle of Landstein. After a bloody assault, Sickingen was obliged to surrender: he had been mortally wounded. The three princes entered the fortress, and after searching through it, discovered the stout-hearted knight in a vault, lying on his bed of death. He stretched out his hand to the Elector Palatine, without seeming to notice the princes who accompanied him; but these overwhelmed him with questions and reproaches: “Leave me in repose,” said he, “for I must now prepare to answer a more powerful lord than you!.....”When Luther heard of his death, he exclaimed: “The Lord is righteous and greatly to be praised! It is not by the

sword that he will have his Gospel propagated." Such was the melancholy end of a warrior, who, as elector or emperor, might perhaps have raised Germany to a high degree of glory; but who, confined within a narrow circle, wasted the great powers with which he had been endowed. But it was not in the tumultuous bosoms of these warriors that the divine truth, coming down from heaven, was to take up her abode. It was not by their arms that she was to prevail; and God, by bringing to nought Sickingen's mad projects, confirmed anew the testimony of St. Paul: The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God.

Another knight, Harmut of Cronberg, a friend of Hutten and Sickingen, appears to have had more wisdom and a deeper knowledge of the truth. He wrote with great modesty to Leo X, exhorting him to restore his temporal power to its rightful owner, namely, the emperor. Addressing his subjects as a father, he endeavored to explain to them the doctrines of the Gospel, and exhorted them to faith, obedience, and trust in Jesus Christ, "who is the Lord of all," added he. He resigned into the

Emperor's hand a pension of 200 ducats, "because he would no longer serve one who lent his ear to the enemies of the truth." We find an expression of his recorded that seems to place him far above Hutten and Sickingen: "Our heavenly teacher, the Holy Ghost, can, whenever he pleases, teach in one hour more of the faith that is in Christ Jesus, than could be learnt at the university of Paris in ten years." Those who look for the friends of the Reformation only on the steps of thrones, or in cathedrals and in colleges, and who maintain that it had no friends among the people, are greatly mistaken. God, who was preparing the hearts of the wise and the powerful, was also preparing in the homes of the people many simple and humble-minded men, who were one day to become the ministers of his Word. The history of the period shows the ferment then agitating the lower orders. The tendency of popular literature before the Reformation was in direct opposition to the prevailing spirit of the Church. In the Eulenspiegel, a celebrated popular poem of the times, there is a perpetual current of ridicule against brutal and gluttonous priests, who were fond of pretty

housekeepers, fine horses, and a well-filled larder. In the Reynard Reineke, the priests' houses with their families of little children are a prominent feature; another popular writer thunders with all his might against those ministers of Christ who ride spirited horses, but who will not fight against the infidels; and John Rosenblut, in one of his carnival plays, introduces the Grand Turk in person to deliver a seasonable address to the states of Christendom.

It was in reality in the bosoms of the people that the revolution so soon to break forth was violently fermenting. Not only do we see youths issuing from their ranks and seizing upon the highest stations in the Church; but there are those who remained all their lives engaged in the humblest occupations, and yet powerfully contributing to the great revival of Christendom. We proceed to recall a few features in the life of one of these individuals.

Hans Sachs, son of a tailor of Nuremberg, was born on the 5th November. He was named Hans

(John) after his father, and had made some little progress in learning, when a severe malady compelled him to renounce his studies and take up the business of a shoemaker. Young Hans profited by the liberty which this humble trade allowed to his mind, to penetrate into that higher world in which his soul delighted. The songs that had ceased to be heard in the castles of the nobles, sought and found an asylum among the inhabitants of the merry towns of Germany. A singing school was held in the church of Nuremberg. These exercises, in which Hans used to join, opened his heart to religious impressions, and helped to awaken in him a taste for poetry and music. But the young man's genius could not long remain confined within the walls of his workshop. He wished to see with his own eyes that world of which he had read so much in books, — of which his comrades related so many stories, — and which his imagination peopled with wonders. In 1511, with a small bundle of necessaries, he sets out and directs his steps towards the south. Erelong the youthful traveler, who had met with jovial companions, students roaming from town to town, and with

many dangerous temptations, feels a terrible struggle beginning with him. The lusts of life and his holy resolutions are contending for the mastery. Trembling for the result, he takes flight and hides himself in the small town of Wels in Austria (1513), where he lived in retirement, devoting himself to the cultivation of the fine arts. The Emperor Maximilian chanced to pass through this town with a brilliant retinue, and the young poet allowed himself to be carried away by the splendor of the court. The prince placed him in his hunting-train, and in the noisy halls of the palace of Inspruck, Hans again forgot all his resolutions. But his conscience once more cried aloud. Immediately the young huntsman lays aside his brilliant livery, quits the court, and repairs to Schwatz, and afterwards to Munich. It was in the latter town that, at the age of twenty years (1514), he composed his first hymn “in honor of God” to a remarkable air. He was covered with applause. During his travels he had had many opportunities of observing the numerous and melancholy proofs of the abuses under which religion was buried.

On his return to Nuremberg, Hans settled, married, and became a father.

When the Reformation broke out, he lent an attentive ear. He clung to the Holy Scriptures, which were already dear to him as a poet, but in which he no longer sought merely for images and songs, but for the light of truth. To this truth erelong he consecrated his lyre, and from an humble workshop, near the gates of the imperial city of Nuremberg, issued tones that reechoed throughout Germany, preparing men's minds for a new era, and everywhere endearing to the people the mighty revolution that was going forward. The spiritual songs of Hans Sachs and his Bible in verse were a powerful help to this great work. It would, perhaps, be hard to decide who did the most for it — the Prince-elector of Saxony, administrator of the empire, or the Nuremberg shoemaker!

Thus, then, was there in every class something that announced the Reformation. Warnings appeared on every side, and events were hastening on which threatened to destroy the work of ages of

darkness, and to “make all things new.” The hierarchical form, which the efforts of many centuries had stamped upon the world, was shaken, and its fall was nigh. The light that had been just discovered spread a multitude of new ideas through every country with inconceivable rapidity. In every grade of society a new life was in motion. “What an age!” Exclaimed Hutten; “studies flourish — minds are awakening it is a joy merely to be alive!” Minds that had lain dormant for so many generations, seemed desirous of redeeming by their activity the time they had lost. To leave them unemployed, and without food, or to present them only with such as had long supported their languishing existence, would have betrayed ignorance of man’s nature.

Already did the human mind clearly perceive what was and what should be, and surveyed with a daring glance the immense gulf which separated these two worlds. Great princes filled the thrones; the timeworn colossus of Rome was tottering under its own weight; the ancient spirit of chivalry was dead, and its place supplied by a new spirit which

breathed at once from the sanctuaries of learning and from the homes of the lowly. The printed Word had taken wings that carried it, as the wind wafts the light seed, even to the most distant places. The discovery of the two Indies extended the boundaries of the world. Everything announced a great revolution.

But whence is to proceed the blow that shall throw down the ancient building, and raise a new one from its ruins? No one knew. Who possessed greater wisdom than Frederick, greater learning than Reuchlin, greater talents than Erasmus, more wit and energy than Hutten, more valor than Sickingen, or was more virtuous than Cronberg? And yet it was not from Frederick, or Reuchlin, or Erasmus, or Hutten, or Sickingen, or Cronberg!

.....Learned men, princes, warriors, nay the Church itself — all had undermined some of the foundations; but there they had stopped. In no direction could be seen the powerful hand that was to be the instrument of God.

And yet all men had a presentiment that it would soon appear. Some pretended to have discovered in the stars unerring indications of its approach. Some, as they looked upon the miserable state of religion, foretold the near coming of Antichrist. Others, on the contrary, predicted a reformation to be close at hand. The world waited in expectation. Luther appeared.