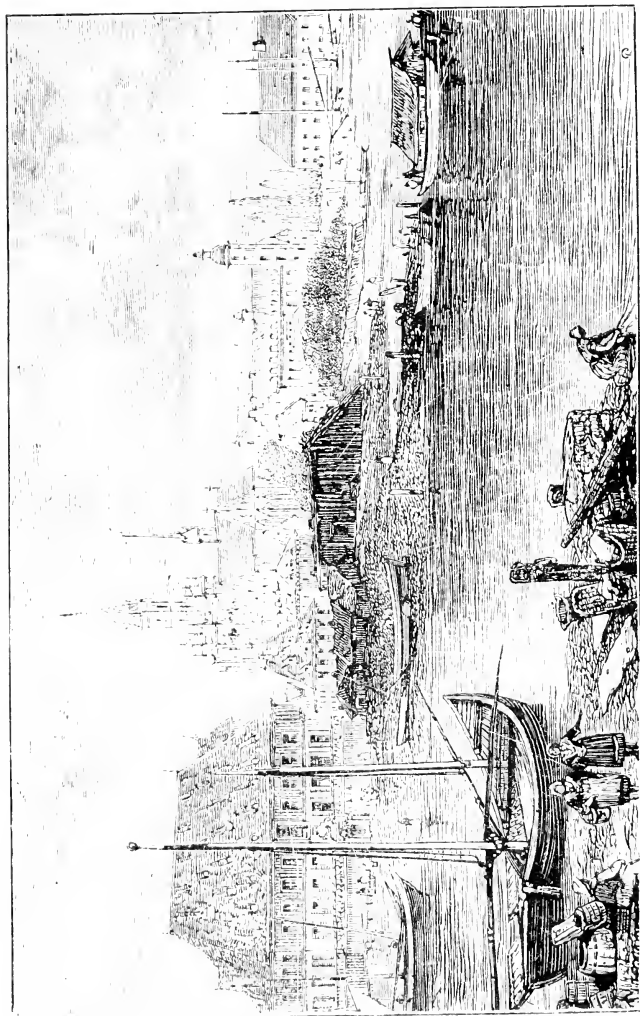






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CONSTANCE.

The Church History Series.

I.



PRELUDES TO
THE REFORMATION

OR

From Dark to Day in Europe

BY THE

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PREFACE.

THE writer of the following work trusts that its title, 'Preludes to the Reformation,' expresses accurately its nature and object. In considering any great crisis in the world's history, we must look not only at the immediate causes of it, or the prominent actors in it, but we must also trace the preparations which have been made for it through the ages. These antecedents altogether elude the cursory attention given to them by a large proportion of the readers of history. The river rolls onward in its subterranean course; but they do not care to observe its windings, or the caverns through which it has passed, until it again bursts forth into the full blaze of day, and pours its fertilizing tide over a barren waste, so as to clothe it with rich vegetation. They admire the grandeur of the thunder-storm, but they do not consider the manner of the gradual formation of the store of electric forces which have caused it suddenly to roll down the valleys and to waken the echoes of the mountains.

Thus, certain historians fix their attention on the Reformation under Luther in the sixteenth century, which is the object of their just admiration; while

they altogether overlook the four or five centuries preceding it, which they call contemptuously 'dark ages.' They should, however, remember that the one period is necessary to the production of the other.

To gain a clear idea, not only must the more prominent causes of the Reformation be considered, but it is needful to examine events, biographies, and literary and theological works, which at first do not seem likely to help in the search, and which may even seem to present matter foreign to the purpose. Thus only can a full view be obtained of the nature of one of the most important changes of which this world has ever been the theatre.

To sketch in outline these early sources of the great movement is the aim of the following work. It may, for this reason, be suited for an age which will, it is to be hoped, have a greater desire than its predecessors to know the causes of events and the lessons of history. For another reason, also, it may be found useful. An examination of the history of those nations which have been favoured with a revelation from Heaven will serve to show us that they have always discovered a mournfully consistent propensity to overlook or deny that great Scriptural truth that there is 'a God who judgeth in the earth.'

Thus was it with the Church and people of the Jews. They attributed to the gods of the surrounding heathen nations those calamities with which God had visited them, in punishment of the sins by which

they provoked Him to anger. A similar inclination seems to prevail in the present age. We do not, indeed, attribute our calamities to Melcom, or Ashtoreth, or the Queen of Heaven. But we are often guilty of that refined idolatry which consists in overlooking the great First Cause, and in attributing to the operation of second causes events which have flowed from the special appointment of God.

Against this view the writer of the following work would enter his protest. He wishes to ask his readers—‘Shall there be good as well as evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?’ He would remind them that ‘fire and hail, snow and vapour, wind and storm, fulfil His word.’ He would bring before them this certain truth, That if God gives beauty and fragrance to the flowers, and watches the fall of the most insignificant of the birds of the air, He also directs those events and revolutions which at any time shall befall the nations of the earth.

The Author ventures to indulge the hope that, considered in both these points of view, the work may be found useful; and expresses his earnest desire that all who read it may be impressed with a deeper conviction that God had been making preparation through the ages for the blessed and glorious Reformation.

PRELUDES TO THE REFORMATION.

CHAPTER I.

THE GRADUAL DECLINE OF THE POWER OF THE PAPACY.

IF one of the primitive Christians had risen from the dead in the fifth or sixth century, he would have thought that the Church of that time had greatly degenerated from the simplicity of those days when she abode in the Catacombs, and was obliged to struggle for her existence with the armed power of the imperial persecutor. The robes of the priests were stiff with gold and brocade, and adorned with needlework of divers colours. Mitres and tiaras, rich with gems, blazed upon their brows. This magnificence corresponded to the sacredness with which their characters were supposed to be invested.

The heathen nations, before their conversion to Christianity, regarded their idolatrous priests with veneration. They always consulted them, both in civil and military affairs. They accorded to Christian priests the same superstitious reverence after their conversion to Christianity. And yet we believe that scarcely any of them were animated with that burning love for immortal souls which constrained the great

Apostle of the Gentiles to labour in the service of his Divine Master.

The character of the priesthood had undergone a total change. The work of corruption began immediately after the conversion of Constantine, and continued to advance through the following ages. A tide of wealth flowed into the coffers of the Church. An opinion prevailed that men might be guilty of the greatest crimes and excesses, provided they made liberal donations to the clergy. The ministers of Christ were invested with the attributes of earthly sovereignty. They lifted their mitred fronts in courts and public assemblies; they issued from their feudal halls with their armed vassals, spreading ruin and desolation around them.

No doubt motives of policy, as well as of superstition, influenced the monarchs of Europe when they made the clergy their vassals, and invested them with temporal power. They expected much more fidelity from a body of men consecrated to the service of Jehovah, than from a turbulent and warlike aristocracy, who were completely ruled by the corrupt passions of their nature. But by whatever motive they were influenced, they inflicted a great injury on the Church. Those very men were surrounded with earthly pomp and magnificence who ought to have taught their followers, both by precept and example, to look down with a holy contempt on the pomps, pleasures, and vanities of this passing scene!

A careful examination of the history of the Church during the centuries which succeeded the conversion of Constantine shows us that the character of the clergy became worse from age to age. They were steeped in vice and sensuality. The higher clergy passed their lives amid the pleasures of luxurious indulgence, while the lower were often guilty of crimes which bring the greatest disgrace on human nature, and are the grossest violation of the laws of society. The contagion of their example spread to all orders of the community. They were as a virulent ulcer, the painful throbbing of which was felt not only to the extremity of the diseased member itself, but extended even to the vital parts, and infected the very source and centre of life.

Pope Hildebrand succeeded in an object which his predecessors had attempted in vain, and imposed on the clergy the unnatural law of celibacy. The penalty inflicted on the priests for retaining their wives after this arbitrary edict, was the loss of their ecclesiastical preferment. The object aimed at was to separate them from civil society, and make them a caste, which, unconnected by matrimonial ties with the world around them, would be more likely to combine for the advancement of the interests of Rome. They were to become, like the monks and friars, the devoted creatures of the Papacy. They were to be saved from the temptation of restless projects for the advancement of their families, which had caused so much scandal in

the world; and from those accumulations of clerical wealth which they would no longer need, as there were no sons and daughters to which they could be bequeathed, and which would become the inalienable property of the Church. It was intended to give to the world an exalted idea of the sanctity of the clergy, inasmuch as, in order that they might give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word, they would forego that connubial bliss, the portion of those—

‘The happiest of their kind,
Whom gentler stars unite, and in one fate
Their hearts, their fortunes, and their beings blessed.’

But the policy thus designed to strengthen the Church wrought deadly injury to her best interests. Vice and profligacy prevailed to a fearful extent among the clerical order. In many countries the concubinage of the priests was expressly commanded. In some places the priest paid the bishop a tax for the woman with whom he cohabited. Facts of this kind are an evidence of the prevalence and flagrant nature of their irregularities, and furnish a striking commentary on the real tendency of the unnatural law of celibacy.

But the wealth, the luxury, and the ostentatious style of living adopted by the clergy, served, more than any other causes, to alienate the affections of the laity from them, and to prepare the way for the Reformation. Superstitious men commonly supposed

that the best mode of evincing their gratitude to the priests for the benefits which they were supposed to confer, was to invest them with temporal authority, and to bestow wealth upon them. In Germany the clergy owed a large part of their opulence, and much of their temporal distinction, to the disputes between the emperors and the clergy with which the country was for a long time distracted. Ranging themselves beneath the banner of the popes in the civil warfare which followed, they gladly availed themselves of the opportunity thus afforded them of usurping the royal prerogative in their respective dioceses, and of wresting from the emperor some of the largest and most important domains in the empire.

Another circumstance also contributed to swell the revenues of the clergy. As the property of the Church was considered sacred, and escaped unscathed when all around was made desolate, many of the laity made over their lands for a time to the clergy, and consented to become their vassals, till the storm of war had exhausted its fury. Thus the power of the clergy was greatly increased, and they very often gained absolute possession of the lands entrusted to them for a limited period. Much property also which, if the law of celibacy had not been imposed on the clergy, would have been distributed among their families, was appropriated for the sole use of the Church.

The wealth and temporal authority thus acquired proved very injurious to the cause of Romanism. Men were impressed with a deep conviction that a Reformation was wanted when they saw the rulers of the Church indulging in all those vices and excesses which often follow in the train of wealth and rank.

Another cause of the excessive unpopularity of the clergy was their immunity from civil jurisdiction. An idea prevailed very extensively in those dark and superstitious ages, that if the clergy had been guilty of crimes which rendered them justly obnoxious to punishment, the laity ought not to lay their unhallowed hands upon their sacred persons, but that they ought to be arraigned before a spiritual tribunal. The clergy, who had always been indebted to the superstition of the laity for opportunities of extending their jurisdiction, at length claimed, as an absolute right, that they should take exclusive cognizance of offences committed by their own body. Afterwards they obtained absolution on very easy terms. A pecuniary payment, proportioned to the rank of the offender, at once freed him from the punishment inflicted on the crime of murder by the civil tribunal.

This practice of compounding for crime—originally commenced in a rude and turbulent age, when the Law found a difficulty in vindicating her majesty—was retained by the Church long after it had been abolished by the civil judicature from a conviction of the disastrous effects which it produced. The result

was that the clergy were emboldened to plunge without scruple and remorse into the practice of every vice and the perpetration of every crime. While malefactors among the laity were brought before the ordinary tribunal, and suffered that condign punishment which they had fully merited, clerical offenders dared to stand around the altar and to perform the most sacred rites of their religion, even after they had been guilty of the greatest enormities.

The monks also had gradually become as corrupt as the remainder of the clerical body. Originally certain advantages flowed from the establishment of monastic institutions. The individual who was pursued by the savage violence of a foe rejoiced when, on arriving at the brow of some hill, he saw the grey walls of the monastery rising in the valley beneath him; for he was well aware that if he could only succeed in crossing the threshold, the hand of violence would be unable to assail him. The monasteries also were the home of all the learning of the age. To the monks we owe the preservation of the works of those illustrious men of ancient times who still mould the taste and genius of mankind. Their services, too, as chroniclers have been very valuable. If the monks had not preserved a record of contemporary events, the probability is that the memory of them would have altogether perished. To them also we are indebted for the preservation and multiplication, by transcription, of ancient copies of the inspired writings, and of commentaries

upon them, during a stormy and turbulent era.¹ Within those walls, too, the study of church architecture was successfully prosecuted; so that it is to the monks we owe the idea of those time-honoured structures which at once astonish and delight us by the harmony of their proportions and by the chaste beauty of their architecture. In addition, they ministered to the spiritual and temporal wants of the sick, the destitute, and the afflicted, and they poured the oil and wine of heavenly consolation into the wounded spirit. We find in the ecclesiastical records of the eighth, ninth, and following centuries, many muniments which show us that a part of the revenues was applied to the use of the sick, the stranger, the poor, the fatherless, and the widow.

While, however, we make these admissions, we must not forget that the monastic system was the fruitful parent of all those vices which disgrace human nature. Many of the monks were lazy and ignorant. The compulsory celibacy of the inmates of these institutions was a source of incalculable evil. In the absence of the check imposed by a regular episcopal visitation, from which they had obtained exemption, they systematically disregarded the high ends for which

¹ The great increase of the MSS. during the eleventh century is to be ascribed to this monastic leisure. This was the first step towards the revival of ancient and modern learning. St. Bernard, in the twelfth century, inculcates the duties of writing and copying as the best substitute for labour.

they were originally established. The surplus wealth, formerly applied to the maintenance of learning and to the relief of the aged, the impotent, and the helpless, was spent in keeping large retinues of servants to do the work which ought to have been done by themselves, and in enriching men who were forbidden by the laws of their founder to possess any private property. Fraud and simony also prevailed in these institutions.

But there were deep-seated abuses and corruptions in the papal system itself. No doubt they were, to some extent, the cause of its descent from its proud elevation. We cannot fix the time when the papal empire over mankind was first shaken. We have the same difficulty in settling when old age, creeping on a man, began to rob him of his strength. Slowly this extraordinary power decayed through successive generations.

It exhibited symptoms of weakness before the accession of Boniface VIII., in 1294, and the premonitory signs of its coming decay began then to appear. The causes of its decline are to be sought in the history of the preceding age. The pope, in prosecution of his design of reigning supreme over the Churches as well as over the monarchs of Christendom, had appropriated to himself not only all the rights and institutions of the Church, but also the powers formerly exercised by the emperors and Frankish kings in ecclesiastical matters. The bishops

were first placed in absolute subjection to the See of Rome. In the ninth century the French prelates presented a firm front to the pope, and they even threatened to excommunicate Gregory IV., because he had come into France, and had, under the pretext of mediating between the contending parties, espoused the cause of the sons of Louis the Meek, who had rebelled against their father. The title of Universal Bishop was admitted only as implying a power of general oversight, not as entitling the popes to exercise their functions in every diocese. But at length, convinced that a persuasion of the pope's omnipotence was firmly fixed in the minds of the laity, the weapons which they had hitherto wielded successfully dropped from their hands, and they were no longer able to resist this spiritual autocrat. By a Constitution of Alexander II., they were not allowed to exercise their functions until they had received the confirmation of the Holy See.

National Churches now found themselves subject to an irresistible despotism. But the hand of arbitrary power must be seen and felt in order that it may be obeyed. Accordingly, with the view of subverting the ancient constitution of the Church, legates were appointed to represent the majesty of the pope in the territories far remote from the central seat of government. The ensigns of sovereignty with which they were surrounded struck terror even into assemblies consisting of the highest and mightiest of this world's

potentates. Assuming unlimited authority over National Churches, and determined to extort money which they might pour into the papal coffers, these legates lived in splendour at the expense of the victims of their tyranny: deposing bishops, holding synods, promulgating canons, and pronouncing the sentence of excommunication against those who had dared to resist some arbitrary decree which they had issued from their council chamber.¹

Again, the popes began by asking as a favour that a particular living might be conferred on some one whom they strongly recommended. These recommendatory letters were called mandates. But examples produce custom. The doubtful precedent of one generation became the established rule of the next; so that, at length, they obtained a large share of the patronage in most of the countries of Europe. Through the imbecility of Henry III. of England, who offered no opposition to papal encroachments, the pope had obtained the presentation to some of the best benefices in England. Then he claimed the presentation to the preferment held by all clerks who died at Rome. As, from various causes, the number of them was considerable, he had obtained in this manner a large share of ecclesiastical patronage. Thus, then, in various ways he wrested benefices from their lawful patrons,

¹ On the general duties of the legate, and his influence in promoting the consolidation of the Papacy, see Planck, iv. pt. ii. 639, sq.

which enabled those who held them to live in ignoble ease in their palaces on the banks of the Tiber. The popes, too, extorted large sums of money from the Churches of Europe, at first for the purpose of promoting a crusade for the recovery of the Holy Sepulchre, but afterwards that they might be able to conduct to a successful issue some scheme which had for its object their aggrandisement as temporal princes. The papal legates continued by their extortions and assumptions to excite the indignation of those to whom they were sent.

This extortion and appropriation of benefices caused the expression of loud discontent in National Churches, and occasioned the loss of the prodigious influence which the popes exercised over the secular clergy and the hierarchy. The Statutes of Provisors, passed in the reign of Edward I., in England, in 1351, 1353, and 1363, with penalties rising one above another in severity, expressed the indignation of England against the popes because they conferred benefices on their creatures, the revenues of which they spent in luxurious living in foreign countries. The laity also were justly indignant on account of the venality of the priests, when they found them openly selling bishoprics and benefices at Rome to the highest bidder; especially when they saw that the wealth thus poured into their treasury was appropriated to the purpose of swelling the pomp and augmenting the retinue of the pretended successor of the fisherman of Galilee.

But there were other causes of the gradual diminution of the power of the popes. The long contest between the Papacy and the Empire had left in the minds of the vanquished party an animosity which sought its gratification in vituperative language against the Papacy, by which it had been deprived of its pre-eminence among the nations. Interdicts had the effect of exasperating the minds of men against a power which deprived nations of the ordinances of religion because their monarchs had disobeyed some edict which had gone forth from the council chamber of the Lateran. Many of the best friends of Rome, without intending to do so, shook the superstructure to its foundation. St. Bernard, in the twelfth century, and other distinguished ecclesiastics, seem to have forgotten that when they were denouncing the avarice, luxury, and corruption of the pope and the hierarchy, they were doing their utmost to bring Rome into contempt, and to impair its might and majesty. Others aided them in their assault on the Papacy. Songs, in which the venality and avarice of the pope, legates, and cardinals were made the subject of satire, were sung at the boards of the monks or in the banqueting-hall of the feudal castle.

Powerful as these causes were, it is important to remember that the popes did not suddenly descend from their proud elevation in the time of Boniface VIII. This pope, who was elected in 1294, surpassed even Innocents III. and IV. in the extravagance of

his pretensions, launching his spiritual thunderbolts against states and empires, and laying claim to supreme dominion over the monarchs of the earth. He ought, however, to have seen that the time for these extravagant claims was passing away. The influences already described were at work, gradually undermining the fabric of papal domination. Boniface should have observed in England the ardent aspirations of its inhabitants after civil and religious liberty. This desire was evident from the enactment of the Statute of Provisors just referred to. Those who had won for themselves Magna Charta were not likely to submit to the dictation of the pope in ecclesiastical matters. Causes were now gradually withdrawn from the ecclesiastical to the civil courts. Ecclesiastics guilty of civil offences were now constantly summoned before the latter.

The royal power of France had also been very much increased. At one time the great vassals had usurped their territories, and barely submitted to the nominal authority of the monarch. But by steady perseverance the Kings of France were able to consolidate their power on the ruins of the authority of the feudal oligarchy. The clergy were astonished to find, instead of a superstitious people crouching in abject submission before them, a body of men of great intellectual power suddenly rising up, who, appealing to the civil law and the Pandects of Justinian, which had been discovered at Amalfi, in Italy, gained a wonderful influence over all classes of the community. Those texts,

because they were written, were regarded by a people who had lately emerged from barbarism with an awe which is almost incomprehensible. They were of greater antiquity than the canons of the Church. By the nature of that law, and partly by the determination to oppose the clergy, the lawyers were led greatly to magnify the royal prerogative. The King of France was, according to these jurists, like the despotic princes of ancient Rome, like the Roman Emperors who inherited the name, the sole fountain of legislation, the embodiment of right and justice, the absolute master of the lives and property of his subjects.

Boniface was, however, blind to the existence of these influences which were in operation against the Papacy, and was determined to surpass his predecessors in arrogance. He ought to have seen that the tyranny and corruptions of the Church of Rome had prepared the way for a revolt against the papacy. He was not aware that the human mind, strengthened by the learning cultivated by the Arabians in Spain, was beginning to awaken from the slumber of ages, and to be prepared for a full investigation of his claims. He could hardly hope to be successful in an age when Dante wrote that remarkable poem, in which he attacked the abuses, corruptions, and vices of the Papacy.

He began the conflict in the following manner. The hand of extortion had pressed very heavily on the clergy, both in England and France, because the

kings of both countries, who were engaged in war, had found it necessary to keep an army on foot by regular pay. Boniface, finding that this war and this taxation continued, issued his celebrated bull, *Clericis Laicos*, in which he pronounced sentence of excommunication on those who should levy or pay taxes on the property of the Church without the consent of the pope. The end, however, was that the clergy in England and France were compelled to acknowledge their obligation to contribute to the burdens of the State, and that Boniface was obliged to soften his obnoxious bull in regard to France. Philip and Edward III. finding that, on account of the heavy imposts levied on the inhabitants, war was unpopular in both countries, requested Boniface to arbitrate between them. The issue was the conclusion of a treaty which seemed likely to promote a lasting peace between the two nations.

This appointment as arbitrator did not lessen the arrogance of Boniface. But no doubt the success attending the jubilee which, fortified by the precedent of the Jewish dispensation, he appointed to be held at Rome in the year 1300, added greatly to his haughtiness. He promised plenary remission of sins to all those who that year should visit the shrine of St. Peter. Multitudes obeyed the summons, and poured untold wealth into the papal treasury. Inflated with arrogance, he appeared seated on the throne of Constantine, with the imperial crown on

his head and the sceptre in his hand, shouting, 'I am Cæsar! I am Emperor!'¹

A bull about this time made its appearance, directed against Philip of France, because he had imprisoned the papal legate on account of contumelious language addressed to him. It was expressed in more offensive language than its predecessors, and in it Boniface asserted that he was set over kingdoms to root out, to pull down, to destroy, and to overthrow. It was understood as asserting a power to absolve a subject from the oath of allegiance. Philip, enraged, directed the burning of the bull in Paris, amid the sound of trumpets. All his subjects made common cause with him.

Soon afterwards Boniface issued the celebrated bull, *Unam Sanctam*, in which he had the effrontery to assert that the pope has two swords—the one, the spiritual, to be used by himself; the other, the temporal, to be used by his permission; that the temporal sword is under the spiritual; and that it is necessary to salvation to believe that the whole human race is subject to the Supreme Pontiff. He also sent a legate to Philip, the bearer of twelve articles, involving absolute concession on his part on those points on which he was most opposed to the pope.

Philip, probably humbled by his recent defeat at Courtrai, condescended now to explain away much

¹ We may here observe that Boniface introduced the double crown just as power was passing away from the popes. Since Urban V. they have adopted the triple crown.

which was objectionable in his conduct. This was probably the crisis in the pope's destiny. He might now have terminated honourably his conflict with Philip, and might have been admired by posterity for his courage in contending with the most powerful king in Europe. But he was possessed with a spirit of frenzy. He sent an insolent letter to the king, and redoubled his menaces. Philip, enraged, directed William of Nogaret to exhibit articles against him in a Parliament at Paris. These were to the effect that he had been guilty of arrogance, rapacity, simony, and heresy. While Philip was pursuing this course, he was delivered in an unexpected manner from his implacable adversary.

The pope had retired for a short time to his native city of Anagni. He was about to launch one of his thunderbolts at his powerful adversary. The sentence of excommunication was to be issued on 8th of September. But on a sudden he was awakened from his dream, in which he saw himself placing his foot on the neck of his adversary, by loud shouts in the streets of 'Success to the King of France! Death to Pope Boniface!' William of Nogaret and Sciarra Colonna were rushing at the head of three hundred lawless soldiers through the streets of Anagni. They burst into his chamber, assailed him with reproaches, forced him from his palace, made him ride on an ass through the city with his face to the tail, and afterwards placed him in close confinement.

At length the citizens of Anagni rose against the soldiers, and drove them from the city. The citizens of Rome, also, indignant on account of the sacrilegious violence with which he had been treated, sent a band of horsemen, who escorted him in triumph to the city. But his spirit was broken by the insults which had been offered to him. His enemies say that, foreseeing his approaching end, he dismissed his attendants, refused food, and shut himself up in his chamber, that no one might witness his death-struggles. They add that, after a little time, his attendants burst into the room, and found him dead in his bed, having his head wrapped in the counterpane, with which they supposed that he had suffocated himself. Others say that he breathed his last in peace, surrounded by his cardinals.

But though the exact manner of his death is unknown, there is no doubt as to the effect which his arrogance and effrontery produced on the Papacy. Though apparently as majestic as ever, it gradually lost the power which it once wielded over the nations ; but it would never have descended swiftly from an elevation to which it was never again raised, if it had not been hurled down from it by Boniface VIII. This victory of Philip over Boniface was, in fact, the commencement of a widespread reaction on the part of the laity against ecclesiastical predominance.

The period of seventy years which began in 1305 has been, not unfitly, termed the Babylonish captivity,

because it was passed by the popes beneath the sceptre of a foreign monarch; and because they also were slaves, like the Jews during their exile from the city of their fathers. After the death of Benedict, the successor of Boniface, a fierce struggle for the Papacy was carried on between rival factions. At length the friends of Boniface agreed to accept a proposal made to them by the French party, viz. that the former should nominate three prelates, from whom the French faction should choose a pope within forty days. One of the three so nominated was the Archbishop of Bordeaux. The French party at once saw their advantage. The Papacy was in their gift. The archbishop had hitherto identified himself with the party which had supported Boniface in opposition to Philip. He was a man who could easily be bribed to make common cause with themselves. Philip was therefore recommended to make terms with him. In an interview which he is said to have had with him in the depths of a forest belonging to the Monastery of St. Jean d'Angely, Philip agreed to make the archbishop pope on six conditions, one of which was that he should condemn the memory of Boniface. The compact was sealed, and the archbishop was unanimously elected to the Papacy. Having assumed the title of Clement V., he was compelled by Philip, who wished to have him near him, in order that he might insure an exact obedience, to reside first at Lyons, afterwards at Bourdeaux, and finally at Avignon.

Clement has left behind him a character stained with sensuality and rapacity ; and he will be for ever memorable for having reduced the Papacy to a state of vassalage to the King of France, from which it is wonderful that it ever rose to its former independent position among the nations.

The spell of papal ascendancy was now broken for ever. Men could no longer be inspired with their former awe when they found, after the publication of the Bull of Clement, that a king could not only escape uncensured, but by the obliteration of all proceedings injurious to Philip from the papal record, could even be justified for all his deeds of violence and all his charges against a pope—offences which would have caused the direst anathemas of Hildebrand and Innocent to be fulminated against him.

Like his predecessor, Clement V., John XXII. died shamefully rich. The former bequeathed to his nephew 300,000 golden florins, under pretext of succour to the Holy Land. The lord of a castle where he had deposited his wealth, consisting of gold and silver vessels, precious stones, and other ornaments, seized and appropriated it to his own use. John endeavoured to compel restitution under pain of excommunication, but was unable to do so.¹ The demand amounted to 1,774,800 florins of gold. John had amassed wealth to the amount of 18,000,000 of gold florins in specie, and 7,000,000 in plate and jewels, the produce of

¹ Villani, xi. 20.

exactions levied under the pretext of a crusade ; of annates, or the first year's income of all ecclesiastical dignities, which he was the first to invent ; and of a skilful promotion of each bishop to a richer bishopric, whereby, as on each vacancy the annates were paid, six or more fines would accrue to the papal treasury. He also compelled pluralists to give up all but one benefice each, reserving to himself the disposal of the rest ; and adopted other devices deserving of the strongest condemnation.

This extortion had, in fact, been rendered necessary by the continued residence of the popes at Avignon. The barons in the papal territory, whom they had found a difficulty in coercing into submission even during their residence at Rome, availed themselves of the opportunity afforded by their absence of wresting from them one province after another, with its revenues. They were thus obliged, in the manner above described, to supply their deficiencies. This extortion was, however, greatly prejudicial to the best interests of the Papacy. The clergy were alienated from the popes when they found them laying their hands on their treasures. They would indeed have taken patiently the spoiling of their goods, if the popes had been satisfied with supplying their immediate and pressing wants, or even with maintaining the pomp and ceremonial befitting their high dignity. But their indignation knew no bounds when they saw themselves robbed of their treasures that their spiritual

lords might not only live in luxury and exhibit in their courts the mimic splendour of Oriental magnificence, but that they might even hoard up the massive bars of gold and silver in their treasure-vaults.

The minds of men had been dazzled by the glory which seemed to surround the popes when they planted their feet on the necks of the prostrate monarchs of Christendom, and seemed to be aiming at dominion, that they might give liberty to the captives and break in pieces the chains of the oppressor. They did not see that the popes were only aiming at self-aggrandisement, and that the polity which they sought to establish was bad enough when considered as the ideal of a kingdom of this world, but unseemly in the extreme in connection with that kingdom, not of this world, which it was the object of the mission of their Divine Master to establish. But the spell was broken, the charm was dissolved, when they saw the pretended successor of the fisherman of Galilee bowing down before the golden idol, and soiling his hands, like Mammon, 'the least-erected spirit that fell from heaven,' by ransacking the bowels of the earth in search of perishing earthly treasure.

The terrible licentiousness, luxury, and worldly pomp of the court at Avignon, especially during the pontificate of Clement VI. (1342-1352), were also causes of the decline of the Papacy. The illustrious Petrarch, the 'Italian songster of Laura and of love,' who was for a time residing in Avignon, has given us

the following description of it in his letters called the Mysteries: ¹—‘All that they say of Assyrian and Egyptian Babylon, of the four labyrinths, of the Avernian and Tartarean lakes, is nothing in comparison of this hell. All that is vile and execrable is assembled in this place. Gold is the only means of escaping from this labyrinth. . . . Here reign the successors of poor fishermen who have forgotten their origin. They march, covered with gold and purple, proud of the spoils of princes and people. Instead of those little boats in which they gained their living on the Lake of Gennesaret, they inhabit superb palaces. . . . To the most simple repasts have succeeded the most sumptuous feasts; and where the apostles went on foot, covered only with sandals, are now seen insolent satraps, mounted on horses ornamented with gold, and champing golden bits.’ He has elsewhere expressed the greatest horror of the abominations which filled the ‘New Babylon of the West.’

His accuracy is confirmed by all contemporary writers. Vice, in the persons of Clement V., John XXII., and Clement VI.,² sat enthroned in the high places of Christendom. The plague, called the ‘Black

¹ *Epist. Sin. Tit.*, 705. See also *Sonnetto* 107, where he speaks of Rome as ‘Babylon faithless and wicked,’ and as ‘a hell on earth.’

² For a description of the rapacity, nepotism, and licentious splendour of the court of Clement VI., see Matteo Villani, lib. iii. c. 43.

Death,' which at this time descended as a judgment from God on the nations of Europe, converting Avignon and many of the cities into one vast sepulchre, did indeed startle into seriousness the debauchees of the papal court.¹ But no sooner had the visitation passed away, than they plunged madly into the vortex of pleasure and dissipation, and became twofold more the children of hell than before. We cannot wonder to hear that the world had lost all reverence for the Papacy, when we find that the pope and his cardinals only too closely answered to the description given by Petrarch.

This was a state of things which every one could understand. The errors and superstitions introduced into the Church did not inflict the first fatal blow on the papal system. Christendom must be placed above the Church in intellectual and religious development, in order that it may see whether the Church had corrupted and mutilated the faith once delivered unto the saints. But there was an order of things quite level to the comprehension of the meanest intellect, when men saw the ambassadors of the Prince of Peace making use of secular weapons for the defence of their spiritual interests,—when they saw that the offerings which the tribes of Christendom poured into the treasury of the Church became the means of pampering a luxurious court, and of enabling the Papacy to send

¹ Three-fourths of the inhabitants of Avignon are said to have died of the plague.

forth soldiers to ravage and to destroy. Then immediately the Church became powerless for good, because the men of the world could say that she had sunk to the same level as those whom she ought to have taught, both by precept and example, to rise to their high destinies, and to seek the imperishable crown.

The residence at Avignon had become in another way injurious to the Papacy. The pope was indeed surrounded there, as at Rome, with the pomp and ceremonial of a court. The world, however, lost its awe of him, because he was only nominally seated on the throne of St. Peter, in a cathedral unhallowed by the ancient and sacred associations connected with that mighty shrine which rises in stately grandeur above the supposed tomb of the chief of the apostles. He was no longer, besides, an independent sovereign, reigning in the territory which Constantine and Charlemagne were supposed to have conferred on the Church; but a subordinate prince, in an obscure city, in a narrow territory, not his own, where he was surrounded on all sides by the kingdom of France.¹ He was thus completely under the influence of a monarch, Philip the Fair, who had inflicted a deep wound on the Papacy in the person of Boniface, and afterwards of another, John, who had suffered an inglorious defeat on the bloody fields of Crecy and Poitiers.

The pope's ecclesiastical censures were generally

¹ Avignon was in Provence, which Charles of Anjou had obtained in right of his wife.

disregarded; and the papal claims sounded ridiculous when made by a captive. Notwithstanding his anathemas, Louis of Bavaria continued in possession of the imperial dignity; and the rebellious lords refused to surrender the territories which they had wrested from him in Central Italy.

The schism of the anti-popes, which followed the death of Gregory XI., with whom ended the seventy years' 'Babylonian captivity,' was still more disastrous to the Papacy than the residence at Avignon. While the cardinals were engaged in deliberating as to his successor, the Roman mob surrounded the conclave with loud shouts, and demanded the election of a pope who should be a Roman or an Italian. The cardinals, terrified by their threats, elected in 1378 the Archbishop of Bari, who assumed the name of Urban VI., thinking that they should thus satisfy both parties, as he was not only an Italian, but also a subject of the French sovereign of Naples.

Finding, when it was too late, that they had placed over themselves a pope who rendered himself obnoxious to them by his harsh and imperious manner, the French cardinals, anxious to retain the pontifical court in their own land, withdrew from their allegiance, and elected an anti-pope, Robert of Geneva, who assumed the name of Clement VII. They alleged, as their justification for the act, that they were under a constraint when they elected Urban VI. They would have remained quiescent under the dominion of Urban,

if he had not provoked them to anger by haughtiness and rudeness.

The world could not fail to regard the popes and their office with well-merited contempt when they saw them afterwards wandering about Europe blackening each other's character, exerting every effort to enlist the princes of Europe in their cause, and hurling at one another their spiritual thunderbolts. The rapacity and venality of the popes during this period surpass all description. New taxes constantly imposed, new methods of extortion constantly invented, were the means by which every one of them endeavoured to reimburse himself for the loss of the spiritual allegiance of Christendom.

Thus men became more determined to oppose the Papacy. Thus the cup of public indignation became full to the very brim. Thus an earnest desire was awakened in the minds of a large proportion of the inhabitants of Europe for the cleansing of the Augean stable of the Papacy.

CHAPTER II.

UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPTS TO REFORM THE CHURCH.

As a result of the growing conviction that an extensive reformation was needed in the Church, various persons, at different times, exerted every effort to accomplish this object. But, as before the introduction of Christianity men were taught by the failure of the ancient philosophers that the work of reforming the world was one to which they were altogether unequal, so sufficient proof was given in the failure of the various efforts to reform the Church, that man could, by no plans of his own devising, conduct this reformation to a successful issue.

The poets, the men of literature, and especially the Italian poet, Dante, laboured in vain to attain this end. No doubt the primary object of Dante in his immortal poem, the *Divina Commedia*, which he probably began at the commencement of the fourteenth century, was to glorify Beatrice, whose surpassing loveliness had captivated his youthful imagination. Her death seems to have shrouded his existence in an impenetrable gloom.

At length his melancholy found vent in the poem which has been the means of transmitting his name to

succeeding generations. The poet describes in it his visits to the infernal regions, to purgatory, and to paradise. When the heathen poet, Virgil, by whom Dante intended to represent enlightened reason, had conducted him through the first, Beatrice appears to him, appointed to guide him through paradise.

The grand idea present to the mind of the poet was the glorification of Beatrice; but there was also a secondary object, viz. the reform of the civil and ecclesiastical polity which was at that time established in Italy. Dante was one of those who prepared the way for the Reformation. It is true that only in a qualified sense can we look on him as a reformer. He was to the close of his days a bigoted follower of the papal antichrist. But he has assigned to some of the popes a place in the infernal regions. He inveighs bitterly against Pope Nicholas and Pope Boniface, on account of their avarice and simony. The former, on account of his simony, was buried head foremost in the livid rock. Flames play over the soles of his feet, causing them to move to and fro in excruciating agony. He is represented as anticipating a similar fate for Pope Boniface, whom he directly charges with having by corrupt means obtained the papal tiara, and with having made use of the opportunities afforded him by his exalted dignity to add to the wealth which he had already accumulated.

Dante then launches forth into a strain of righteous indignation against the popes, telling Nicholas that

he well deserved the torments inflicted upon him. He then charges these successors of St. Peter with having bowed in guilty adoration before an idol of



DANTE.

(From the picture by Giotto.)

gold and silver, and compares Rome to that mystic Babylon—that woman arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and

pearls, having a golden cup in her hand, who had surrendered herself to the lewd embraces of the monarchs of Europe. He also condemns in no measured terms the simony of Boniface VIII. He charges him with writing his ecclesiastical censures only to be paid for revoking them. St. Peter also rebukes the covetousness of his successors in the apostolic chair.

The covetousness of the monks is also censured. St. Bernard is represented as declaiming against the corruption of the order which he had established. The walls which he had reared, intending them to be the home of a race of holy and self-denying men, consecrated to the service of the sanctuary, had become the dens of vice and infamy. The cowls, designed to overshadow wan and wasted countenances, on which mortification had set its seal, had become sacks choked up with musty meal.¹ The clergy, both secular and regular, had, in fact, greatly degenerated from their primitive purity.

‘Modern shepherds need

Those who on either hand prop and lead them,
So burly are they grown; and from behind
Others to hoist them. Down palfreys’ sides
Spread their broad mantles, so as both the beasts
Are covered with one skin. O patience! thou
That look’st on this, and dost endure so long.’²

The avarice of the popes was not the only sin with

¹ *Paradiso*, canto xxii. v. 76-78.

² *Ibid.*, canto xxi. v. 130-135.

which they were chargeable. Arraying themselves under the banner of the Guelphs, they kindled and kept alive in Italy the flames of civil war. St. Peter is represented as complaining that the keys, the well-known emblems of papal authority, were emblazoned on the standards which floated in the very front of the battle, wherever it raged most fiercely.¹ The implacable animosity which the popes felt towards the leaders of the Ghibelline or imperial party appears very strongly from the exulting expressions which Pope Innocent IV. used when he heard of the death of Frederick II., King of Sicily.² He thus wrote to the clergy of Sicily: 'Let the heavens rejoice, and the earth be glad, for the storm that was hovering over your heads has been averted by the death of this man, and is changed into refreshing breezes and nourishing dews.'³ Pope Urban IV. afterwards fulminated his anathemas against Manfred, who had usurped the crown to the prejudice of the just rights of his youthful nephew, Conradin, the grandson of Frederick II., and offered the kingdom to Charles of Anjou, brother of St. Louis, king of France. Charles afterwards

¹ *Paradiso*, canto xxvii. v. 46-51.

² The names of Guelph and Ghibelline were first heard in the contest for the imperial crown in 1137, in which Guelph, Duke of Bavaria, was defeated by Conrad, Duke of Suabia, the lord of the town of Wibelung, in Franconia. They were employed in Italy to keep up civil dissension after their meaning was forgotten.

³ Sismondi, *Repub. Ital.*, vol. ii. p. 244.

invaded Sicily, and defeated Manfred in the bloody battle of Benevento. The heaps of bones piled up in the battle-field, even in Dante's time, bore witness to the disastrous effects produced by the wrath of him who, as the ambassador of the Prince of Peace, should have endeavoured to allay, instead of fomenting, civil discord, and should have bound together in bands of love the various members of the human family.¹

We see then that while Dante shows that he was a bigoted Romanist by honouring the office, he does not hesitate to visit individual popes, Boniface and his predecessors, with unsparing censure. In condemning them he condemned that system which gave them the power of interfering in matters of civil government. It was his firm belief that many of the disasters of Italy owed their origin to the union of the temporal and spiritual authority in the pope. Thus, he says,—

‘The Church of Rome,
Mixing two governments that ill assort,
Hath missed her footing, fallen into the mire.’²

Again, he compares the pope, on account of this

¹ *Inferno*, canto xxviii. v. 15-17; *Purgatorio*, canto iii. v. 124-132; and Giovanni Villani, *Istoria*,³ book vi. c. 90-92.

² *Purgatorio*, canto xvi. v. 127-129.

union of the temporal and spiritual power, to an unclean beast under the Levitical law—

‘Who chews the cud, but does not cleave the hoof.’¹

He assigns limits to the temporal power of the pope in the treatise *De Monarchia*. He was impressed with a deep conviction that Italy would never be ‘great, glorious, and free,’ until her different states were consolidated into one government, under a powerful central authority. The different states had been prevented by this cause from offering an effectual resistance to the army of the invader. Hence Dante was indignant against the popes, chiefly because they might naturally be expected to oppose that consolidation from the fear of being deprived of the ensigns of earthly sovereignty.

He found that his apprehensions were not without foundation when he saw Clement V., from the operation of this motive, withholding his adhesion to the cause of the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry of Luxemburg, very soon after he had expressed the wish that the different states of Italy might be consolidated under his dominion. For this reason he has branded him with infamy, as ‘a shepherd without law,’ and has represented him as having a mournful pre-eminence

¹ *Purgatorio*, canto xvi. v. 98, 99. ‘The camel, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof, is unclean unto you’ (Lev. xi. 4).

in crime above his numerous predecessors who had outraged the laws of society.¹

Boniface VIII. was an object of detestation to Dante, not only on account of his avarice, and all those vices which have consigned him to well-merited infamy, but also and above all because he was looked upon as the greatest opponent of the consolidation of Italy under the emperor. He surpassed even Gregory VII. in the arrogance of his pretensions, launching his spiritual thunderbolts against states and empires, summoning princes before his tribunal, that he might, as an infallible judge, settle their controversies, and laying claim to supreme dominion over all the monarchs of the earth.

It is clear that Dante's object was to effect a political as well as a religious reformation. He wished dissensions to cease throughout Italy. The Papacy was especially obnoxious to him because it taught the multitude to seek their happiness in the indulgence of the vice of avarice.

‘Therefore the multitude who see their guide
Strike at the very good they covet most,
Feed there, and look no farther.’²

Thus was created an obstacle to the regeneration of Italy which the poet deemed insurmountable; for the avaricious would oppose the advent of the emperor

¹ *Inferno*, canto xix. v. 83.

² *Purgatorio*, canto xvi. v. 100-102.

because they might be deprived of their wealth. Now this corruption is directly attributed by him to the fatal dowry of temporal dominion which the first Constantine was alleged to have conferred upon the Church.

‘Ah! Constantine, to how much ill gave birth,
Not thy conversion, but the plenteous dower
Which the first wealthy Father gained from thee.’¹

The *Divina Commedia* may be said to have been composed not only to glorify Beatrice, but also to remove the Papacy and other hindrances to the regeneration of his native land. He endeavours to deter men from sin, and to animate them to the practice of virtue, by a fearful representation of the torments inflicted on all classes of notorious offenders, by a glowing description of the joys of the heavenly paradise, where the cheek is fanned by soft zephyrs, breathing the most delicious odours, where thousands of feathered songsters warble their notes behind a leafy screen, where the grass is spread out like a rich carpet beneath their feet, enamelled with variegated flowers of a matchless hue, where a rivulet flows through verdant meadows, whose limpid waters surpass in transparent clearness the clearest of those streams in which the lovely skies of his native land reflect their deep azure.

But in vain did Dante expect in this manner to raise Italy from her political degradation. The refor-

¹ *Inferno*, canto xix. v. 110-113.

mation which he advocated was perfectly compatible with subjection to some of those numerous lusts which reign with undisputed authority in the hearts of a large proportion of the members of the human family. He was anxious that the demon of avarice should be expelled from his country. He wished that the voice of faction should no longer be heard, and that the music of contentment should resound through the valleys of Italy. But he did not discourage his fellow-countrymen from remaining willingly subject to other tyrants, equally powerful and equally oppressive. He was himself led captive by the unholy and revengeful passions of his nature. He seems to delight in, as he describes with a terrible minuteness, the excruciating sufferings of those whom he has fixed in the gloomy regions of everlasting despair.

He was also the slave of another sin, equally hateful to the God who is of too pure eyes to behold iniquity. The sullen and contemptuous curve of his lip shows the existence of a pride which led him to look down with contempt on his fellow-creatures. His spirit chafed at the idea of obligation to those friends who strove, by their offices of kindness, to lessen the bitterness of exile, to bind up that bleeding and broken heart, and to pour the balm of consolation into that wounded spirit. Notwithstanding his hospitable welcome by the Scaligieri at Verona, his spirit revolted at the idea of being constrained to live on another's bounty. He felt

‘How hard the passage to descend and climb,
By other’s stairs.’¹

He has therefore shown us, both by precept and example, that while on personal and political grounds he would wage a war of extermination with certain sins, he would extend his indulgence to some which equally render us obnoxious to the just displeasure of God, and expose us to the certainty of condemnation.

Thus the reformation which Dante contemplated would only have been partial in regard to its objects, he meanwhile being determined to uphold all the doctrines of Romanism. A little reflection will show that the system of the Church of Rome tends directly to the dissolution of those bands which hold the framework of society together. Take, for instance, her doctrine that faith is not to be kept with heretics. This was acted on at Constance, when, in direct violation of the safe-conduct given by the Emperor Sigismund, John Huss and Jerome of Prague were committed to the flames. It was a public and avowed doctrine, even in Dante’s time, that the pope could exempt a man from the obligation of an oath if the observance of it should prevent him from pursuing a course by which, in the opinion of his spiritual advisers, he might be better enabled to promote the Divine glory. These casuists held that if a man promised to marry a woman, he was set free if he

¹ *Paradiso*, canto xvii. v. 59.

should determine to enter a monastery. Even Thomas Aquinas—whom Dante terms the ‘*Angelic teacher*,’¹ and whom he represents as one of that ‘*blessed wreath*’ of rejoicing spirits surrounding him in paradise with strains of melody—taught that, provided children turn friars, they are free to disobey their parents.² Take again the sanction which the same Thomas Aquinas has given to the composition for crimes. He asserted ‘*that there actually existed an immense treasury of the pious deeds which the saints had performed beyond what was necessary for their own salvation; that the guardian of this treasure was the Roman pontiff; and that he was empowered to assign to such as he thought proper a portion of this inexhaustible source of merit suitable to their respective guilt, and sufficient to deliver them from the punishment due to their crimes.*’³

Fortified by the authority of their illustrious doctor, the popes directed tables to be set forth, in which the rate of absolution was fixed for any imaginable crimes. Thus then the foulest murderer and parricide, if he escaped the condign punishment which the law pronounced on his crime, might laugh to scorn the fear of future retribution which God has implanted in the soul.

Thus the system of error sanctioned by Dante was subversive of order and morality and injurious to the

¹ *Purgatorio*, canto xx. v. 67.

² Thomas Aquinas, lib. i. c. 101.

³ Mosheim’s *Church History*, part ii. c. 3, sect. 4.

best interests of society. If he had pronounced a distinct condemnation on all the fundamental errors and vicious practices of the Church of Rome, he might have raised his native land to a high and palmy state among the nations of the earth. But he proved utterly unable to arrest the progress of that moral leprosy which infected all orders of society. The disease waxed continually worse from age to age. The Church at length became a mass of corruption.

We have seen how the excessive avarice and opulence of the clergy alienated from them the affections of all classes of the community. Innocent III., who had first dismissed Francis of Assisi with contempt, at length convinced that, from this cause, he would soon lose his hold on the masses, accepted Francis' offer to establish a body of men who, like the disciples of our Lord, possessed neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in their purses, and depended for the means of support on the alms of the faithful. The Dominicans, the rivals of the Franciscans, were a society of itinerant preachers, and were not, in the first instance, bound by any vow of poverty. But when Dominic observed that the vow gave the Franciscans an immense superiority in public estimation, he thought it right to imitate their self-denial, and imposed the obligation of poverty on his disciples.

The influence which these orders obtained soon justified the expectations of their followers. Men had expressed their wonder that St. Francis should have

established a community which could not exist without a perpetual miracle. But Francis answered that He who clothes with beauty the lilies of the field would not suffer those who devoted themselves to His service to perish from want of sustenance. In fact, his profound knowledge of human nature at once led him to predict that his order would inspire an enthusiasm which would be its safeguard from dissolution.

Multitudes pressed forward, anxious to be enrolled in the fraternity. In the course of ten years the delegates to the general chapter of the order exceeded 5,000. In fact, the Mendicant Orders so enormously multiplied that Gregory X. found it necessary in a council at Lyons, in 1272, to repress, as he called them, 'those extravagant swarms of holy beggars,' and to confine the institution of mendicants to the Dominicans, Franciscans, Carmelites, and Hermits of St. Augustine.

The influence of these orders with the multitude has never been surpassed. Unlike the earlier religious orders, they were directed to stand on the world's highway, and to address to those around them the words of exhortation and remonstrance. Those bare feet, that robe of serge, that gravity of demeanour, that indifference to the pomp and pageantry of earth, produced a wonderful impression on the minds of their fellow-countrymen. The starting tear at the sight of misery, the earnest endeavour to lighten the burden which pressed so heavily upon men, at once

won for them the affections of the poorer classes of the community. They would stand near those stricken down by the plague, who were shunned by all the world besides; they would hold their heads in their last fearful struggle between the flesh and the spirit, and cheer them with the prospect of a world where they would exchange their squalid raiment and beggar's staff for a sceptre and robe of immortality. We cannot wonder, therefore, that they should have won the affections of the masses; or that their poverty, their abnegation of self, should have served to counteract the effect already produced by the avarice and corruption of the clergy.

But their influence extended still further. The lord of the feudal castle, unable to derive any comfort from the ministrations of his chaplain, who had often been the gayest of the gay at the festive board, would summon to his bedside one of those holy men, with the fame of whose sanctity the neighbourhood was ringing, that he might confess to him and receive absolution before his departure. Their influence, however, was not confined to spiritual matters. They passed from the sick room of the feudal lord to the cabinets of princes. They were the secret spring of many great political combinations, which affected the happiness and interests of their contemporaries, and of generations then unborn.¹

¹ They are found at the court as counsellors, chamberlains, and treasurers.—Matt. Paris, p. 541.

But this season of prosperity was soon followed by a season of rapid decline. The dying noble to whose bedside they were summoned, grateful for their services, would often force on them a rich estate; or they would themselves extort from him the same bequest as the price of their absolution.¹ The popes also, feeling that they owed a debt of gratitude to them, placed at their disposal an ample store of indulgences, to make compensation to them for their voluntary poverty. They also conferred on them the richest livings, and employed them in difficult and delicate negotiations. They had also the privilege of wandering about the country to preach to the multitudes, and to give absolution, without a licence from the episcopal order.

Thus endowed, we find that these beggars who, like their Divine Master, had not at first where to lay their head, rivalled—nay, eclipsed—the secular clergy in their gorgeous vestments and in the pomp with which they were surrounded.

We cannot wonder, therefore, that the hierarchy and secular clergy, whose province they had invaded, and whose hatred and envy they had excited by the privileges conferred upon them, should have availed themselves of the opportunity of attacking them on account of their shameless abandonment of the funda-

¹ 'They beset the dying bed of the noble and wealthy, in order to extort secret bequests from the fears of guilt or superstition.'—Matt. Paris, p. 541, ed. 1684.

mental principle of their founder. The dissensions between the two parties produced the most dreadful disturbances in various parts of Europe.¹ They created a scandal in the Church, and aroused the world from its dream of infatuation. Endless disputes for pre-eminence between the Franciscans and the Dominicans interrupted the harmony and endangered the existence of the Roman Catholic Church. The rival theologians erected altar against altar, loaded one another with opprobrious epithets, and wasted in unseemly controversy the energies which ought to have been employed in promoting the onward march of moral and spiritual regeneration. We find also that they were justly censured because, so far from diminishing, they increased the disorder and immorality which pervaded all classes of the community. They encouraged the inhabitants of the parishes into which they intruded to come to them for confession, asserting that, from their superior knowledge of the human heart, they would prove better guides in the discharge of their duty than the parochial clergy. The consequence was, as the chroniclers inform us, a fearful increase in licentiousness; for the people were no longer obliged to blush before their ministers. Wiclif, during the latter part of his life, carried on a ceaseless warfare with the brotherhood. He denounced them

¹ According to Matt. Paris, the popes were so infatuated with them, that they made those whom they could not employ in civil affairs their publicans, beadles, etc., p. 634.

as the pests of society, as the enemies of truth and godliness.

We see then that another attempt to reform, promoted by the Church of Rome itself, failed of the wished-for success. Nay, the institution increased the evil which it was established to remedy. The covetousness, the arrogance, the disputes of the mendicants, as well as the immorality promoted by them, proved the means of inflicting a grievous injury on the Church of Rome. The weapon forged by the popes for the defence of the Church was, by an overruling Providence, turned against them.

The councils, summoned for the purpose, attempted in vain to reform the Church. In the town of Constance, near mountains whose fir-clad sides lend an additional charm to the scenery around them, close to a lake in which the Rhine, wearied with its tumblings amid the precipices of the Alps, sleeps peacefully before it plunges over the falls at Schaffhausen, from 1414 to 1418 there was gathered an illustrious assemblage of monarchs, ecclesiastics, statesmen, and warriors.¹ Many of its most conspicuous members, as Peter d'Ailly, Cardinal Zabarella, and Robert Hallam, Bishop of Salisbury,² whose names were at that time

¹ There were 3 patriarchs, 23 cardinals, 27 archbishops, 150 bishops, 100 abbots, 100 counts and barons, and 200 doctors.—*Lenfant Histoire du Conseil.*

² Robert Hallam was appointed Bishop of Salisbury by papal bull, dated June 2nd, 1407. He was made a cardinal

known to fame, are now forgotten by the world. Others, such as John Gerson, the determined foe of papal corruptions, the learned theologian of the council which he had exerted every effort to bring together, are now seen only indistinctly through the mists of intervening ages.

During the sittings of the council, 50,000, and sometimes 100,000 strangers, including 18,000 ecclesiastics, with 30,000 horses, were assembled within the walls of the city. Merchants and traders, artists and craftsmen, players, jugglers, and musicians to the number of 1,700, attracted by the prospect of gain, supplied the wants of the assembled Fathers, and contributed to their amusement in the intervals of their solemn deliberations. The eyes of all Europe were fixed on the council. Every one indulged the fond expectation that a remedy would be found for the simony, the extortion, the oppression, the worldliness, the immorality which had become intensified to a degree beyond the possibility of endurance.

The council was solemnly opened on Nov. 5th, 1414. The first proposition wrested the superiority in it from the pope. As the Italians were numerous and entirely

on June 6th, 1411. In 1417 he went to the Council of Constance, and dying at Gotlieb Castle in the same year, was buried in the Cathedral of Constance. Dean Milman regards his death, in the midst of the deliberations of the council, as fatal to the cause of many effective reforms in the Church. —*Latin Christianity*, viii. p. 50.

subservient to him, it was clear that if the members voted by the head the Italians could easily prevent any measures for reformation. It was arranged, therefore, that they should vote by nations, consisting of the Italians, Germans, French, and English. The question was soon publicly discussed whether the council or the pope was the superior authority. The superiority of the council was maintained by Gerson in a very eloquent sermon, and was affirmed by the general consent of the Fathers assembled at Constance. The council afterwards proceeded to adopt measures for the termination of the schism in the Papacy. This schism did not depart with the death of Urban VI., in 1389, or of the anti-pope Clement VII., in 1394. On the contrary, it lasted forty years. Two popes for a long time shared the obedience of Europe in nearly equal proportions. The cardinals of the two parties had at length agreed to summon a general council to meet at Pisa in March, 1409. The results of the council were the deposition of the two popes and the election of the Cardinal Archbishop of Milan, who assumed the name of Alexander V. The expectations of union formed from this council were not realized. As the two previous popes would not resign, three popes instead of two were contending with one another for the allegiance of Christendom. The elevation of Balthasar Cossa, who assumed the name of John XXIII., which followed the death of Alexander in 1410, caused all classes to demand with

greater vehemence a reform in the papal system, since he was a monster of iniquity. Wearied out with the evasions of John, who, when called upon to resign, attached impossible conditions to his resignation, the Fathers at Constance cited him to appear before them; and having, in his absence, found him guilty of licentiousness which surpasses all belief, of murder, massacre, tyranny, avarice, and the most atrocious cruelty, they solemnly deposed him from the pontificate. The same sentence of deposition was passed on Gregory XII. and Benedict XIII.

The great question for consideration, after the deposition of these popes, was, whether or no the election of a pope should take precedence of the reformation of the Church. The Emperor Sigismund, the English, and the Germans were firmly convinced that if the pope were elected first, the latter, which had been the great object of the assembly of the council, would never be accomplished. The cardinals, on the other hand, were firmly convinced that if they elected a pope fettered by rules previously established, they would sign the death-warrant of that system of corruption which they were determined, if possible, to maintain. They did this, moreover, although they were well aware that the system had been prejudicial to the best interests of religion, and that it had been condemned by all classes of the community.

A fierce battle, the din of which resounded through Europe, raged between the two parties during the sum-

mer months. The orators on the one side urged with great eloquence all the arguments just referred to, and with the fiercest invectives against their opponents described the universal pollution and corruption of the Church. On the other hand, the cardinals, supported by the Italians and the French, the latter of whom, though anxious for reform, had joined them because the English, on the opposite side, had just humbled their pride on the bloody field of Agincourt, pointed to the headless trunk extended before them, and expatiated on the danger impending over the Church from any delay in the election of a pope.

The designs of the cardinals were crowned with the wished-for success. After the defection of the English representatives, whom the cardinals won over to their side after the death of their renowned leader, Bishop Hallam, of Salisbury, and of two German bishops, who had been bribed with the offer of better preferment by their opponents, the victory did not remain in suspense for a moment. The leader of the host, the Emperor Sigismund, still indeed for a time fought on valiantly, but was at length obliged to yield to overwhelming numbers.

All his forebodings were realized. He could no longer hope for success in the conflict. Martin V., who had been elected by the conclave, with the reluctant consent of the emperor, soon showed that he was determined to resist any comprehensive measure of reform. After publishing a few constitutions tend-

ing to redress some of the evils which had arisen during the schism, and having made concordats with the Trans-alpine nations, the breach of which would awaken no general indignation, he contrived to postpone to future assemblies—to be held, the one at the end of five years, and the other at the end of twelve years—the question of reformation.

The council was then dissolved on the 16th of May, 1418, after a session of three years and a half. Arrayed in gorgeous robes, under a canopy supported by four counts, while the Emperor and Elector of Brandenburg held his bridle, the pope rode forth from the city of Constance, followed by a cavalcade of 40,000 princes, nobles, and ecclesiastics, mounted on richly caparisoned horses, as splendid as any which had ever marched in the train of the highest and mightiest of this world's potentates.

The scene was symbolical of the victory which had been gained by the Papacy. Martin V. resumed all the authority which Christendom had given to his predecessors. The right of a council to impose restrictions on the pope remained a barren proposition. The pope, whom the assembled Fathers had appointed, had prevented them from accomplishing that great work of Church reform for which Europe had been waiting in anxious expectation.

The council which, according to the arrangement just referred to, met at Pavia, and afterwards at Siena, in the year 1423, separated on the 8th of

March, 1424, having made scarcely any proposals on the subject. The one which, seven years afterwards, Martin V. summoned to meet at Basle just before his death, seemed more determined than its two predecessors to prosecute vigorously the work of reformation. A French and a Spanish bishop were at first proposed as his successor; but by one of those accidents which often determine papal elections, the choice fell on Gabriel Condolmieri, Cardinal of St. Clement, the most insignificant member of the sacred body, who assumed the name of Eugenius IV. He was narrow-minded, obstinate, hostile to all deviations from the doctrines of the Church, and entertained a lofty idea of the power and prerogatives of the Papacy.

The council assembled at Basle on December 18, 1431. Eugenius, seeing that its members, urged on by their respective sovereigns, were determined to persevere, sought reconciliation with it, and rescinded on the 15th of December, 1433, the bulls which, on the most frivolous pretexts, he had published for its dissolution. The pope's legates were admitted to the presidency of it on swearing, in their own names, that all men, including the pope, were bound to obey it. Decrees were now passed for the entire freedom of elections in churches; against usurpations of patronage, reservations, annates, or first-fruits; against frivolous appeals; against the abuse of interdicts, the concubinage of the clergy, and other corruptions which

had rendered the Court and Church of Rome a by-word among the nations.

The legates of Eugenius, who were strongly opposed to the reforming spirit thus exhibited, acting according to his secret instructions, endeavoured, by creating delays, by sophistry, artifice, and fraud, to prevent the deliberations of the Fathers from being crowned with the wished-for success. But they persevered in their self-allotted task; intrigue did not divide, difficulty did not discourage them. Their eloquent secretary, Æneas Silvius Piccolomini, who afterwards, we grieve to say, as Pope Pius II., abandoned the cause for which he had laboured at Basle with so much zeal and energy, says: 'A holy brotherhood, the true senate of the world, consisting of bishops celebrating the holy Eucharist, of doctors reading sacred histories, or writing by the light of a candle, or meditating on some high and holy theme,' might here be seen gathered together, engaged in a work which had for its object the purification of the Papacy, the removal of abuses from the Church, and the regeneration of Christendom.

The council of Basle continued its sittings, and proceeded to extremities against Eugenius. It first suspended him and then deposed him from the Papacy. The members elected an anti-pope, Amadeus, Duke of Savoy, who assumed the name of Felix V. The council, however, having been deserted by many of its leading members, who strongly disapproved of the

daring course on which it had entered—as even the Council of Constance had not asserted the right of deposing a lawful pope—gradually sank into insignificance. Its forty-fifth and last session was held on the 16th June, 1443; but it was not dissolved till 1449. Nicholas V., the successor of Eugenius, found no difficulty in obtaining the cession of Felix, and in terminating the schism. The emperor and many of the princes of Germany, which nation had hitherto been neutral, but in a sense favourable to the council, bribed by the pope with a large share of ecclesiastical patronage, had, before its dissolution, joined him in resisting the demand for a reformation. Thus the cause of the Synod of Basle was lost in Germany. The victory of Eugenius was complete. By adroit management he prevented the assembling of a new council, and had almost recovered the allegiance of Christendom. Even the slight concessions with which he deluded the Germans were withdrawn in secret bulls. When, shortly before his death, he received the homage of the German ambassadors, the event was celebrated (February 7, 1447) by the ringing of bells and the blazing of bonfires in the principal streets of Rome. The means which he had employed to obtain the victory wrung from him the agonising confession in his last moments, ‘O Gabriel, how much better were it for thy soul’s salvation if thou hadst never become cardinal and pope!’

Thus then two celebrated councils altogether failed

in effecting the regeneration of Christendom. The causes of their failure may be easily discovered. The Fathers of Constance, by their barbarous and tyrannical treatment of John Huss and Jerome of Prague, showed very plainly that they were opposed to that true reformation which was the object of those illustrious men. Huss and Jerome wanted something more than a reformation in the simony, the corruptions, the discipline, the patronage of the Church. They wished to limit the authority of the pope, and they opposed indulgences. They believed, however, in transubstantiation. The deliberate perfidy of the Fathers when, violating the safe-conduct given to Huss, they condemned both to the flames, and declared that neither faith nor promise was to be observed to the prejudice of the Catholic Church, has been visited with just reprobation in all succeeding ages.

A cry of indignation rang through Europe because no measures of reform had followed the deliberations of the council. The virulent ulcer still remained. A different result should not have been expected. The truth is, that every attempt altogether to eradicate the abuses of the papacy must fail of the wished-for success. If we examine the history of the following ages, we find that those who have dealt with it as a great spiritual corruption, as a body 'full of wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores,' incapable of a permanent cure, have often been successful in their opposition to it; while those, on the other hand, who

have treated it as a good institution, the abuses in which might be removed, have always failed in their object.

Nicholas V. and Pius II. failed in their efforts, each in his own way, to reform the Church. Their object was to divert the attention from reforms in the ecclesiastical system, and to make the Papacy a means of promoting the best interests of the nations of Europe. The transformation of Rome into the undisputed capital of Europe, the attainment for the Papacy of an overpowering prestige which was to enthral the minds of men—these were the objects towards which their efforts were unceasingly directed.

Nicholas V. had done much to promote the love and study of the Greek and Latin languages and literature in Italy. His noblest title to glory is that he laboured to keep alive the flame which, as we shall see in the next chapter, was beginning to glow in his native land. After his elevation he was the patron, as he was before the friend, of the numerous learned men scattered through Italy, whom he employed in rescuing from destruction the treasures of antiquity, and in preparing the way for the proper understanding of them. He sought for and purchased books in every part of Europe. Five thousand volumes were collected by him in the Vatican Library, of which he laid the foundation.

His idea was that Rome should be the capital of

Italian thought, and a missionary centre of culture to Europe. He employed a noble band of architects in erecting superb edifices, in restoring churches which were slowly falling into ruins to more than their original splendour, and in building fortifications which might serve to protect Rome from the turbulent multitude within the city, and from the armies of the invader. He raised these magnificent structures for the purpose of preparing Rome for the high place which he intended her to occupy among the nations of Europe.

Nicholas V., however, expected too much when he imagined that commotions would cease, and that he would be able to carry into effect a design of superhuman magnitude. The capture of Constantinople by the Turks, in 1453, dispelled the vision of the Renaissance. Like a thunderbolt from a serene sky that calamity had descended on the nations of Europe. From his intimate knowledge of foreign countries, Pius II., Æneas Silvius Piccolomini, already mentioned in connection with the council, who became pope in 1458, knew well the extent of the danger which threatened them.

The crusade against the Turk became the absorbing passion of his life. But to ensure success, he saw that the enterprise must be undertaken by the whole of Christendom, which must be united for that purpose under the pope. He hoped that he should add to the power and influence of the Papacy if he made it the

means of saving Europe from the impending calamity. Immediately after his elevation to the Papacy, he summoned a council at Mantua, at which he succeeded, by his unrivalled eloquence, in kindling a warlike enthusiasm in the breasts of his hearers, and in inducing them to promise to send an army of 90,000 men to arrest the powerful armies of his foes. But scarcely had his voice ceased to sound in their ears when the members of the council returned to their dissensions, and forgot the high and holy enterprise to which he had summoned them. Again 'the old man eloquent' strove to kindle into a flame the expiring embers. 'Life itself,' he said, in the consistory, 'must be laid down for the safety of the flock committed to us. The Turks are wasting the provinces of Christendom. What expedients remain to us? To oppose arms to their invasions? We have no means to provide them. What then? Shall we exhort the princes to confront and expel them? We have already attempted in vain to do so. Perchance they will listen better if we say to them, Come. We will then march in person against the Turks, and invite the Christian monarchs to follow us. It may be, when they shall see their master and father, the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, an infirm old man, advancing to the war, they will take up arms from shame, and valiantly defend our holy religion. We do not indeed propose to draw the sword, but after the example of the holy father, Moses, who prayed on the mountain while

Israel was fighting with the Amalekites, we will stand on some lofty galley or mountain's brow, and entreat the Lord Jesus Christ to give safety and victory to our contending armies.'

The pope carried his determination into effect. He placed himself at the head of a large body of men who had been mustered for him at Ancona. While we cannot condemn too strongly the unblushing effrontery with which he retracted opinions as to the limitation of the power of the pope, expressed in the early part of his career,¹ we cannot fail to admire the self-devotion which prompted him, in his anxiety to preserve the liberties and Christianity of Europe from the danger with which they were threatened, to imperil in his old age, when his frame was debilitated by sickness, his own sacred person in the crusade against the Turks, and the heroic courage which, amid a starving host and universal despondency, stood nevertheless unshaken. But the effort was too great for his exhausted nature. He breathed his last just as the white sails of the Venetian squadron, engaged to convey his forces, were seen from the towers of Ancona.

There is a striking difference between the circum-

¹ In his *Bull of Retraction*, addressed to the University of Cologne, printed in his works, and in Hard. ix. 1449, *et seq.*, he lays down strong principles as to the authority of the Papacy, and says: 'Believe an old man rather than a young one; reject Æneas, receive Pius.'

stances connected with this crusade and the religious frenzy of a former age. The cry, 'It is the will of God!' burst from the lips of the multitudes at Clermont when Pope Urban II., with eloquence far inferior to that of Pope Pius II., animated them to plant the standard of the Cross on the battlements of Jerusalem. Merely because they wished to secure the custody of the Holy Sepulchre, princes, nobles, bishops, knights, and people, rushed upon the plains of Asia. But when the destinies of Europe were trembling in the balance, the pope—even though, unlike his predecessors, he led the way—found himself deserted by all the leaders who had pledged themselves to the holy war, at the head of an undisciplined body of men, who, if they had not previously deserted him, would have fled ignominiously before the hosts of the infidel.

It is evident, then, that while these popes had been successful in diverting the attention of Europe from the question of reformation, and had thus afforded additional proof that it could not be effected from within the Church, yet, in consequence of the captivity at Avignon, the schism, and the attacks made upon the Papacy by the council, they were unable to exercise the same influence as before over the nations. The splendour which now surrounded the popes was like the glory of one of those beautiful days in autumn, when a soft and magical light sleeps over forest, and mountain, and river, and the landscape expands before us, seeming as if newly clothed with all the beauty

and freshness of childhood, while 'the sere and yellow leaves,' glittering with dewdrops, indicate very plainly the near approach of the desolation and gloom of winter.

CHAPTER III.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE REVIVAL OF LEARNING ON THE REFORMATION.

THE revival of learning in the latter half of the fifteenth century was one of the most important factors in the providential preparations for the Reformation. Learning, as cultivated by the Arabians, had previously prepared the way for it. The Arabs seem to have been led to Spain in order that they might minister to the promotion of that end. But their steps were arrested on the confines of Spain in order that Europe might be preserved as a theatre for the development of the principles of the Reformation. This is an illustration of the principle that God, as in the introduction of Christianity, makes slow and remote preparation for important events. The re-conquest of Spain, moreover, was gradual, and thus the Arabs had time to give that impulse to learning which was the means of regenerating Europe. Encouraged by the example of Pope Sylvester II., who in this respect was the unconscious means of working out God's purposes, such of the Europeans, from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries, as were anxious to make progress

in physic, arithmetic, geometry, and philosophy, repaired to the Spanish Universities. But the Arab did not acquire a permanent settlement in Spain, and in his bosom a means of his ultimate ejection from that country was provided. From the wreck of the Gothic Kingdom, which the Arabs conquered, arose a number of States, which at length united in a powerful monarchy which expelled the invaders.

Thus the intellect was sharpened, and was prepared for that full investigation of the claims of the Church of Rome which issued in the Reformation. In the fifteenth century there was a universal fermentation in the regions of thought. A bold spirit of inquiry was abroad among the nations of Europe. No doubt the examination of the treasures of ancient learning, which in consequence of the fall of Constantinople were conveyed to Europe, was a most important means of promoting that spirit. For the effect of the study of the writers of antiquity was that the human mind was aroused from the slumber of ages, and, in the full consciousness of new-born vigour, examined and discovered the errors of the Roman Catholic Church.

But the most important result of the revival was that the light which shone in the New Testament was presented in translations to the nations, and was the means of disclosing the darkness of the Roman system. That light penetrated far and wide, exposing the hidden things of darkness, exhibiting the multi-form delusions with which the Church of Rome had

imposed on the credulity of mankind, laying bare the secret chambers of iniquity, unfolding abominations which shunned the face of day, and causing it plainly to appear that Rome was the antichrist, which, according to ancient prediction, was to arrogate to itself the attributes of Deity, to establish the worship of saints and angels, and to slay the champions of the Christian faith.

Since consequences like these flowed from the revival of the study of Greek literature in Europe, it becomes both interesting and important to trace the apparent development of God's purposes in regard to it through the ages, from their formation to their final accomplishment, shortly before the Reformation.

The rapidity with which the Moslems pursued their desolating march over the East, at first view leads the observer to wonder that Constantinople was not in the early stages of Arabian energy added to that extensive territory which submitted to the laws and embraced the religion of the false prophet Mohammed. When the Moslems commenced their victorious career, the Greek empire was in the last stage of decrepitude. The emperors ruled over their subjects with a despotism which acknowledged no law but the gratification of their own passions. At length, goaded to madness by their accumulated wrongs, they often rose in insurrection against their oppressors. Then followed a state of anarchy, during which the empire might easily have become a prey to the invader. But indolence

and revolution dissolved the power and unity of the Mohammedans, and checked their career of victory.

Afterwards, the crusades in the twelfth century, and when the religious frenzy had nearly subsided, the Moguls during the thirteenth, by giving employment to the army of the Turks, preserved Constantinople. Subsequently, when the Moguls, diverted from the conquest, retired, the remains of the empire in Asia were seized by the independent Turkish emirs, who had established themselves in the mountainous country after the subversion of the Seljukiah dynasty of Iconium. The most illustrious of these, Othman, descending into the plains, wrested towns and castles from the Greek empire. His son and successor, Orchan, effected the conquest of Bythinia. This kingdom was now gradually extending its boundaries. Amurath, the grandson of Othman, crossed over into Europe, and subdued the province of Thrace from the Hellespont to Mount Hœmus. Now, for the first time in its eventful history, Constantinople was surrounded in Europe and Asia by the arms of the same nation. The prudence, however, of Amurath postponed a conquest which might have been easily effected. His successor, Bajazet, rushed with the whirlwind's shock upon the armies of his foes. He extended the boundaries of his kingdom by the subjugation of the independent emirs of Anatolia, until at length, after the conquest of Iconium, they were co-extensive with those of the ancient kingdom of the Seljukians. The

bravest of the chivalry of Europe, defeated by him in the battle of Nicopolis, whitened with their bones the plains of Hungary. Now, if Constantinople had depended simply on its own resources, it might easily have been captured by the fiery Bajazet. The ancient empire of the Romans was limited to a spot fifty miles in length and thirty in breadth. Moreover it was convulsed more than ever by internal discord. But he was restrained at first by the fear that a more formidable army of crusaders, burning with the desire to wipe off the stain which sullied the brightness of their armour, would rush to the rescue of Constantinople. At length, tempted by the prospect of adding this jewel to the diadem now glittering on his brow, he hastened to the assault of that city. The cry of the Emperor Manuel for succour rang through Europe. The King of France heard it, and hastened to the rescue. His marshal, Boucicault, in obedience to his command, girded on his armour, animated with the determination of inflicting vengeance on the unbelievers. But after a vain struggle with his foes, he retired from the territory. And now it seemed as if the last hour of the Greek empire had arrived. Just, however, as Bajazet had invested it by sea and land, he heard that the celebrated Timur was preparing with his warlike swarms to invade Asia. He retired slowly, 'casting a longing, lingering look behind' at the diadem which fancy had held before him at Constantinople. His defeat on the plains of Angora,

in 1402, and subsequent captivity, dimmed the rising glories of the Ottoman kingdom, and postponed for fifty years the conquest of the capital of the Greek Empire.

May we not trace a providential design in these successive interpositions on behalf of Constantinople? With reference to this, Gibbon has the following paragraph: 'The arms of the Turks undoubtedly pressed the flight of the Muses; yet we may tremble at the thought that Greece might have been overwhelmed with her schools and libraries before Europe had emerged from the deluge of barbarism; that the seeds of science might have been scattered by the winds before the Italian soil was prepared for their cultivation.'¹ The historian should have recognised the hand of God in the preservation of Constantinople. We have here an analogy between the circumstances connected with this delay, and the providential preparations for the introduction of Christianity. Just as God delayed the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of its temple, and the deliverance of the Jews from ceremonial bondage, until the minds of the nations among whom they had been dispersed were inoculated by them with certain elementary ideas which He had given them, so He seems to have delayed the fall of Constantinople till the nations of Europe were quite prepared to profit by the works of the Greeks.

The Greeks had long prided themselves on their great superiority to the nations of the West, because

¹ Gibbon, c. lxvi.

they possessed the works of the masters of poetry, eloquence, and song. But they could not appreciate those productions of ancient genius. The truth must be told that the Greeks were a stationary or degenerate nation. They were unworthy sons of those heroes who had fought valiantly for the liberty and independence of their native country, and of those distinguished writers who had formed the taste and genius of mankind in every succeeding age of the world's history.

The Latin world had woken up from the sleep of ages, and was advancing with great rapidity. The various universities were peopled with students who applied themselves with ardour to the pursuit of knowledge and the investigation of truth. The Arabians had contributed to the advancement of scientific inquiry. But now the Greeks were to play an important part in the new intellectual era. Even as early as the thirteenth century, the Emperor Frederick II. had nearly succeeded in reviving the love and study of Greek literature in Europe. He established universities in the first half of the thirteenth century, which, if they had continued to flourish, might have hastened on the glorious era of Italian art and literature. Greek was spoken in many parts of his kingdom. He could himself speak it fluently. In the fourteenth century the illustrious Petrarch laboured most energetically to emancipate the mind from its thralldom. The lyre, over which his fingers wandered with magic skill, was constantly pouring forth strains at once

musical and melancholy, which have exercised a strange influence, not only over the minds of his contemporaries, but of all succeeding generations. But after all, his noblest title to glory is that he laboured to kindle in the minds of men an admiration for those stars of dazzling brightness which, more than a thousand years before, had glittered in the literary firmament of Italy. He collected the works of the old Romans, which were scattered in the various convents in Italy, and having arranged them, and supplied them with tables of contents and marginal notes, exhorted his fellow-countrymen to a diligent study of them. The result was that his contemporaries wrote Latin with the purity and elegance of the Augustan era, the golden age of classical literature.

This renewed study of Latin literature was the beginning of that change in the intellectual habits of Europe which prepared the way for the Reformation. Through the careful study of the works of the ancient authors the minds of men began to glow with the same lofty emotions for which the old Romans were remarkable. Rienzi strove to animate his fellow citizens against the nobles who oppressed them; and Petrarch exhorted them to unite in delivering Italy from the lawless hordes which laid waste the fertile plains of their native country.¹

¹ Simpson's *Literature of Italy*, p. 157. See also Petrarch's stirring appeal to the nobles of Italy, urging them to deliver it from the yoke of slavery.

Petrarch, however, in consequence of his ignorance of the Greek language, could at first only enjoy the beauties of the ancient Greek authors through the imperfect medium of a translation. Barlaam, who came on an embassy respecting the union of the Greek and Latin Churches, afterwards, when he was fifty years of age, gave him some instruction in it. He told Barlaam that without his assistance he could not understand the Iliad and the Odyssey.¹ To Boccaccio belongs more particularly the merit of having fanned into a flame the glowing embers. He composed a prose translation of the Iliad and the Odyssey. But in his life-time only ten students of Homer could be found in Italy. In the following thirty years—that is, from 1370 to 1400—the sun of Greek literature was shorn of his beams. The Italians during that period forgot the very rudiments of the Greek language. It is important to observe these dates, because when Bajazet sat down before Constantinople, in 1401, the Western nations could scarcely be said to be fully prepared to profit by the invaluable treasures of ancient learning deposited within its walls. We see, then, a reason for that apparent providential interference on its behalf when he poured his warlike tribes over the plains of Anatolia.

But at the end of the fourteenth century the sun

¹ Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, c. lxvi.

of Greek literature, never again to be eclipsed, began to pour a flood of light over the nations of Europe. Fear of the horrors impending over the city from the assault of the Turks induced many distinguished scholars to take their departure from Constantinople, with manuscripts which they snatched in haste from the Byzantine libraries. Manuel Chrysoloras was invited to give lectures¹ on Greek at Florence. He afterwards gave them in other parts of Italy. Bessarion, Theodore Gaza, and John Argyroylos aided him in reviving in Italy the love and study of the writers of antiquity. Nicholas V., as we have seen, gathered these and other learned men around him at his court. To him the learned world is indebted for versions of the Greek historians, the Iliad and Odyssey, and the most valuable works of Plato and Aristotle, for which he munificently rewarded the Greek exiles. He likewise employed some in making translations for him. Lorenzo de' Medici eagerly sought for manuscripts of the Greek authors, and was never weary of dwelling on the beauties contained in the pages which the Greek emigrants unfolded to his astonished and delighted view.

The whole of Italy was animated by a similar spirit. These pupils were soon capable of transferring to other nations the knowledge which they had acquired for

¹ Smyth's *Lectures on Modern History*, lecture ix.

themselves. The effect of this converse with the writers of antiquity was to purify the taste, to invigorate the fancy, and to elevate the genius of the inhabitants of Europe. The human mind, in the consciousness of newborn vigour, began to inquire into the whole dogmatic system of the Papacy. Men found, too, that they could no longer take any pleasure in the dry chronicles of the monks or in the absurd disquisitions of the scholastic philosophers on such subjects as the physical condition of the human body in paradise, when their imagination had been fired by the glowing descriptions of Homer, or when they had mused with Plato in 'the olive grove of Academe,' or had listened to the plaintive melody of the Attic warbler in the groves of Colonus.

This revival of a taste for ancient literature was also injurious to Romanism because it led many of its leading members and ministers to breathe the spirit of the heathen world. Men could not fail to be more and more alienated from the Church when they found that, to use the words of Lord Macaulay, the class just referred to consisted of those who, 'like Leo X.' (pope from 1513 to 1522), 'with the Latinity of the Augustan age had acquired its atheistical and scoffing spirit; who regarded those Christian mysteries of which they were stewards just as the augur Cicero and the high pontiff Cæsar regarded the Sibylline books and the pecking of the sacred chickens; and who amongst

themselves spoke of the Incarnation, the Eucharist, and the Trinity in the same tone in which Cotta and Velleius talked of the oracle of Delphi, or the voice of Faunus among the mountains.¹ Some of them even dared, as Erasmus informs us, to his utter astonishment, to attempt to persuade him from Pliny that there is no difference between the souls of men and those of brutes.² But, above all, the effect of this revival was that the meaning of the New Testament was, through an amended version of the Greek text by Erasmus, and a better translation into Latin, brought within the comprehension of the more intelligent part of the community;³ and that all classes were enabled, first of all by Tyndale in England, and afterwards by other distinguished men, to discover from translations into their own languages that Rome had corrupted 'the faith once delivered unto the saints.'

We might naturally suppose that, as there was now an universal diffusion of the treasures of ancient learning, Constantinople would be given up into the hands of the infidel. Indeed, it had long been felt that nothing short of a miracle could save it from destruction. The dread of this inevitable doom, operating upon the minds of the inhabitants of Constantinople, was the means, in the course of God's Provi-

¹ Macaulay's *Essay on Ranke's History of the Popes*.

² Burigny's *Life of Erasmus*, vol. i. p. 139.

³ See my *Life of Erasmus*, pp. 172-189.

dence, of leading some of them to take refuge in a foreign land with that intellectual wealth which was at present of little use to themselves, and was altogether unserviceable to the rest of Europe. Thus the precious hoard was saved from destruction by the Turks when they at length took Constantinople by storm.

Further, in the first half of the fifteenth century the noble art of printing was discovered, which, by greatly increasing the circulation of books, contributed so largely to the regeneration of Christendom. The great scarcity of books, arising from the labour required to transcribe them, was one cause of the ignorance which prevailed during the Middle Ages. This discovery took place, it is important to notice, contemporaneously with the revival of learning, with the fall of Constantinople, and with the dispersion of the buried treasures of antiquity consequent on that event. The Roman Catholic hierarchy endeavoured to enlist the energies of the printing-press in their service. Splendid volumes, in a bold type, which displayed the new art in all its magnificence, were constantly issuing from their presses in Rome, Florence, and Venice. But these did not obtain a sufficient circulation to aid them in retrieving materially the fallen fortunes of Romanism. After the invention of printing the exclusive authority of the popes over the mind of man was gone for ever. The rude tract, in the ill-cut German type, expressed in terse,

vigorous, and homely language, and rapidly propagated by means of the press, was the potent influence which, escaping all vigilance, and working downwards into the depths of society, sank unanswered into the minds of awakening men; showing the bond-slaves of Rome how to cast off the formalism and superstition of ages, to secure the blessing of reconciliation with their Maker, and to obtain the imperishable crown.

The real connection between the revival of the study of ancient learning and the advancement of the Reformation in Europe becomes the more important, because attempts are sometimes made to assign an undue influence to the revival, which cannot be accepted as an adequate explanation of the cause of that great religious revolution. 'It is now admitted by most competent judges,' writes Mr. Lecky, 'that the true causes of the Reformation are to be found in the deep changes effected in the intellectual habits of Europe by that revival of learning which began about the twelfth century in the renewed study of the Latin classics, and reached its climax after the fall of Constantinople in the diffusion of the knowledge of Greek, and of the philosophy of Plato by the Greek exiles.'¹

But though the diffusion of ancient learning may lead to the discovery and removal of errors and abuses,

¹ Lecky's *History of Rationalism in Europe*, vol. i. p. 259

it cannot, by itself, communicate a knowledge of that 'wisdom which alone maketh wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.' The study of Homer or of Virgil could never be the means of effecting the salvation of the Church. The paganism of the poets taught men that religion was a cunningly-devised fable, and eternity a dream. Of what use is the knowledge of literature, independently of religious truth, in taming the passions, in quenching pride, in moderating ambition, in stifling envy and all the malignant feelings of the natural heart? This knowledge may shed a gleam of light over the 'cloudy and dark day' of adversity, and minister consolation during the weary moments of languor and disease; but it cannot cleanse men from moral pollution; it cannot deprive death of its sting, and the grave of its victory; it cannot speak peace to the man who is troubled with a sense of his sinfulness; it cannot give the assurance of pardon; it cannot ensure approval hereafter; it cannot 'minister unto us an entrance abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.'

The moral and spiritual regeneration of Europe was effected at the time of Martin Luther, because the Reformers brought forward Christ prominently as the sole atonement for known and forsaken sin; because they constantly exhibited that gem of sound doctrine, 'Not by works of righteousness which we

have done, but according to His mercy, God saved us ;' because they taught men that the love of Christ should constrain them, in dependence on the aid of God's Spirit, to walk in that path of holy obedience which alone could terminate in their exaltation to glory.

CHAPTER IV.

THE REFORMERS BEFORE LUTHER.

THERE is an important difference between a reformation of abuses and a reformation of dogma. The monarchs, statesmen, and distinguished ecclesiastics who called together the different councils, or those who attempted through other agencies to effect an improvement, were anxious only to restrain the exorbitant power of the popes, to reform the morals of the clergy, and to remove the worst abuses of the ecclesiastical system. A large majority of them, however, never thought of inquiring into the doctrine of the Church. But still many attempts at doctrinal reformation had been made through the ages. The necessity of removing that corruption which was seen to exist was recognised, and the rudiments of a new and better system of doctrine and ecclesiastical polity was prepared by men who had directed their attention anxiously to the subject, and who had gained wisdom by repeated failures.

There were, indeed, differences in the character of these reformers. Some of them, far from the tumult of the world, 'kept the noiseless tenor of their way,'

engaged in pushing their inquiries into the doctrinal system of Romanism. Others, less engaged in theological research, plunged into the thick of the battle. Some of them founded parties, and others breathed out their souls in agony at the stake, amid the shouts and revilings of assembled multitudes. The lives of the latter have a greater dramatic interest than those of the former. Our eyes turn with eagerness to the page which tells us how they emancipated us from our thralldom. Our hearts throb with emotion as we read of those who burst the bands of spiritual despotism. But we feel assured that the work of the one was required to supplement the work of the other. By the practical men alone the Reformation could not have been effected. The study of the writings of the students was required to prepare them for the great work committed to their charge.

The Waldenses come first in order of time, because they had retained the truth in its purity from the early ages of Christianity. The Roman Catholic Church, with the view of vindicating her own antiquity, has asserted that the Waldenses are a sect of later date, and that they derive their name from Peter Waldo, the merchant of Lyons, who lived in that city from 1150 to 1184. This assertion is erroneous. Passage after passage may be cited from her own writers, reporting the constantly asserted tradition of the Waldenses that they existed as a Church long before the twelfth century. Reinerius Saccho, an inquisitor,

and one of their most implacable enemies, thus writes respecting them in the thirteenth century: 'Of all the heretical sects that are, or have been, none is more pernicious than that of the Leonists, first, from its superior antiquity; for some say that it has lasted from the time of Sylvester, others from that of the Apostles.'¹ A century later, Polichdorf thus repeats the tradition: 'The sons of iniquity falsely say before simple men that this sect has endured from the time of Pope Sylvester, when the Church began to have possessions.'²

The majority of those who have considered the subject hold the opinion that the Waldenses have never departed from the faith. Dr. Allix, in his valuable work on the ancient churches of Piedmont, published about 200 years ago, has clearly demonstrated that the whole diocese of the north of Italy, in which the territory of the Waldenses was included, was pure enough, during the first century at least, to deserve the appellation of a true branch of Christ's Holy Catholic Church. Meanwhile the churches in the neighbouring districts began to be corrupted by error and debased by superstition. A gorgeous pomp and ritual disfigured the simplicity of the early Christian worship. The glare of countless lamps at noonday,

¹ *The Pseudo Rainerius*, c. 4, quoted in Gieseler's *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. iii. p. 467 n. 32.

² *Bibliotheca Patrum apud Lenfant, Guerre des Hussites*, lib. ii. v. Claud Seyssel, Archbishop of Turin, writes about them in almost the same words in 1540.

streaming along the aisles of the sacred edifice, dazzled the senses and intoxicated the imagination. Clouds of incense rolled upwards from innumerable altars. Multitudes bowed down in solemn adoration before the shrines of the saints.

The Church in the north of Italy was for some time uncontaminated by the errors of its neighbours. But the wave of corruption gradually swept onward. It rolled, however, in vain against those everlasting rocks which encircle as with an iron rampart the valleys of the Waldenses. Those who were determined to maintain the truth in its purity, retiring before the advancing deluge, found refuge within that impregnable sanctuary. The diocese of Turin had only in a measure, even in the tenth century, departed from the simplicity of the truth as it is in Jesus. We have conclusive evidence that the archbishopric of Milan, in which province the bishopric of Turin was situated, did not become subject to the spiritual jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome till the middle of the eleventh century.

In the meantime an attempt had been made to arrest the progress of corruption. Claud, appointed to the bishopric of Turin in the year 817, laboured with some degree of success to preserve his flock from the errors of Romanism.¹ ‘He denied the reverence

¹ Mosheim’s *Ecclesiastical History*, book iii. part ii. chap. ii. 14. See also, for the quotation, Faber, *On the Ancient Waldenses*, p. 328. He gives his authority.

due to the holy cross, rejected the veneration and invocation of saints, and was a principal destroyer of images.' Peter Waldo, the merchant of Lyons, is the next person who comes before us in connection with the history of the Waldenses. The death of a companion was the means of opening his eyes to a sense of the importance of spiritual and eternal realities. Immediately he began to read the Latin Vulgate, and having found the study advantageous to himself, determined to make it known to others. He was the first to give a copy of the greater portion of the Bible to millions in France, Spain, and Italy, 'in a language understood of the people.'¹ He afterwards trained and sent out his missionaries to sow the seed of eternal life in Lyons and the surrounding country. By the roadside, in the market-place, the lonely farm, and the lordly castle, they neglected no means of propagating their opinions. Opening their little book, they showed the catechumen what the disciples of Jesus must be, and three words were sufficient: Look at Christ, hear His words, follow His steps.²

The Archbishop of Lyons excommunicated Waldo and his followers, because they refused to obey his edict that they should desist from preaching the Scriptures. Afterwards, having been excommunicated and expelled from Lyons, between 1185 and 1190, by a decree of the Council of Verona, some of them

¹ Worsfold's *Life of Peter Waldo*, p. 18.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 35.

scattered themselves in the province of Narbonne and along the banks of the Rhine. A larger number took refuge in the valleys of Piedmont, where they were incorporated with the Waldenses. Waldo himself settled first in Dauphiny, afterwards in Picardy, and ultimately in Bohemia, where he died about the year 1197.

Waldo did not decide on separating from the Church of Rome till after his excommunication. His followers agreed with the Waldenses afterwards in opposing purgatory, the canon of the mass, the invocation of the saints, prayers for the dead, priestly absolution, affirming that God only gives it, and the sacramental character of orders, extreme unction, confirmation, and marriage.

The diligent study of the Holy Scripture, the fundamental principle on which they differed from the Church, greatly aided them in their spiritual progress. The Waldenses up to the time of Peter Waldo held the doctrinal opinions of Claud of Turin. Their religious system had, however, a certain tincture of righteousness by works ; but still it was far more free from it than that of the dominant Church. The doctrine of justification by faith does not stand out from the rest of their doctrines as Mont Blanc, the monarch of mountains, towers above the snow-clad eminences around it. In the *Nobla Leyczon*, a poetical production of the Waldenses in the twelfth century, it is generally the moral aspect of Christianity

which is inculcated. At the commencement we find an exhortation to watchfulness, prayer, and good works, because the end of the world is near. The Waldenses are described as persons who take great pains to observe the precepts of the Gospel, which is brought forward only under the character of a law, and as preferring the Sermon on the Mount to any other part of Scripture. They are represented also as holding that special works of penitence, fastings, almsgivings, and prayers are duties of paramount importance.

The Waldenses, both before and after their union with the followers of Peter Waldo, were a missionary Church. The letter of the Abbot of Steinfield, in the diocese of Turin, to St. Bernard, quoted by Allix, which is dated 1140, shows that they had missions along the Rhine early in the twelfth century. After their union both parties prosecuted with great energy their missionary work. Their teachers, who were called Barbes, or uncles, propagated their opinions in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Strasburg, Ratisbon, Augsburg, Mayence, Vienna, Dauphiny, in the diocese of Turin, and even in Switzerland. We are informed that their labours were abundantly successful. Multitudes renounced the errors of the Church of Rome. The walls of the strongholds of superstition fell prostrate before the blast of the gospel trumpet. So great was the progress of evangelical truth, that any convert going from Cologne

to Milan could always find a host, without going to an inn. The people became everywhere more zealous to understand Holy Scripture for themselves. The robber chivalry of the Rhine, who had often listened unmoved to the cries of unoffending women and children in the hall of their feudal castle, where 'Power dwelt amid her passions,' melted into tears as the herald of salvation discoursed to them with simple eloquence on the love of a crucified Redeemer. The melody of the hymns of Zion floated through halls in Italy and France, in which once were heard only the lays of the troubadour as he swept his lyre.

It is true, indeed, that the ruthless hand of persecution swept away a great part of these foreign churches from the face of the earth. Only between the banks of the Pelice and the Clusone, in Piedmont, have the truths of the Gospel been uninterruptedly preserved from the earliest ages of Christianity. We cannot doubt, however, that the labours of these holy men were links in the chain which connects the first formation with the final accomplishment of the purposes of the Almighty. They prepared the way for Luther and that little band of warriors of the Cross who shook to their foundations the pillars of the Church of Rome.

The Albigenses, or the Cathari, are certainly to be distinguished from the Waldenses. All dispassionate writers in the present day—Gieseler, Neander, Schmidt,

—agree in this conclusion.¹ They sprang from the ancient Church of the Paulicians in Armenia. No vestiges of them are to be found in the south of France and the north of Italy till about the commencement of the eleventh century. In these countries they spread with great rapidity. The soil in the south of France was mined with explosive materials.² A spark falling among them was enough to upheave from its foundation the massive structure of Romanism. The inhabitants of that district had always shown a strong disposition to resist the progress of papal encroachments. The interest awakened by Peter de Bruys and Henry the Deacon also worked for the advantage of the Albigenses.³ The former, after the zealous labours of twenty years in the south of France, Provence, and Languedoc, was consigned to the flames in 1130. His follower, Henry the Deacon, was imprisoned for life in 1157. Of him we read, that he had, through his eloquence, amazing influence with the multitude, and that the deep tones of his voice were like the roar of legions of devils. He manifested a fanatical spirit, and some startling traits of heterodoxy. But they both may have aided the progress of the Albigenses, and prepared the way for the Reformation, by publicly denouncing the corruptions

¹ See especially Gieseler, vol. iii. p. 465, n. 28.

² Gieseler, vol. iii. p. 400. See also Faber, *On the Ancient Waldenses and Albigenses*, pp. 263, 264.

³ Gieseler, vol. iii. p. 400.

of the Church of Rome, and declaring their disbelief of the efficacy of the oblations, prayers, and good works of the living for the dead, as well as of the doctrine of transubstantiation.

The Albigenses also were strongly tainted with heretical views. They rejected the books of the Old Testament, denied the real existence of the body of the Saviour, and repudiated every article of faith which rested on the dogma of the Incarnation ; but they may be said to have been witnesses against Rome, inasmuch as they condemned the vices and dissolute manners of the clergy, and lifted up their voices against transubstantiation, purgatory, and image worship, and the idolatry involved in the mass, and asserted that Rome was the Babylon of the Apocalypse.

Very soon their faith spread itself beyond the narrow boundaries of France. From Bulgaria to the Atlantic they had sixteen churches. But at length the pope was only too successful in organizing a crusade against them. Simon de Montfort was the executioner of his vengeance. The storm of war rolled rapidly over them. The ancient and heroic house of Toulouse fell victims to the fury of the crusaders. The soldiers bathed their swords in blood. The stillness of death reigned through the country.

From this time the name of the Albigenses seems to have almost perished from the face of the earth. The remnant which escaped the steel of the crusaders and

the racks of the papal inquisitors, was gradually absorbed into the Church of the Waldenses.

An important part in the pre-Reformation movement was played by our illustrious fellow-countryman, John Wiclif.¹ His work, which connects him directly with the doctrinal reform of the Church, was carried on during the last six years of his life. If he had died before 1378, he would not have rendered those vast services which give him an overpowering claim on our gratitude. As a Christian minister, he had expressed himself strongly on avarice and worldliness, and the evil lives of the pope, the bishops, and the clergy, and their total neglect of their sacred duties. He had also hitherto conducted the opposition to the Church of Rome as a politician. He attacked its usurpations on the rights of the Crown, and the spoliation of the country for the benefit of those who were spending the revenues of English benefices in idleness at Rome, and sought by legislative measures to reform those abuses; whereas he ought also to have directed his attention to her errors in doctrine. He lopped off the branches, instead of striking at the root of that Upas tree which had shed a deadly blight over the nations.

The schism in the Papacy which for forty years convulsed the nations of Europe was the means of

¹ As I have gone fully into this subject in my *Life of Wiclif*, I shall only give an outline of the conclusions at which I have arrived respecting him, and must refer my readers to that work for fuller information.

directing his attention to this important subject. He had hitherto asserted only that the pope might err in judgment ; that he might fall into mortal sin ; and that his office was not necessary for the ends of salvation. But he had not attacked the Papacy in its



JOHN WICLIF.

essence. When, however, he saw two or three popes wandering about Europe, anathematizing one another ; when he saw Bishop Spencer of Norwich, girding on his armour, flinging wide his standard, in the name of one pope invading the territories of those who sup-

ported the rival pope, leaving sad memorials of his progress behind him in the lifeless forms of thousands of the inhabitants of those countries, who were the victims of the greatest barbarities,—then immediately the cup of his indignation became full to the very brim; then he called both popes monsters; then he asserted that the pope was antichrist.

Now also, released from his subjection to the pope, he began to attack the Church of Rome on the question of dogma. He opposed the doctrine of transubstantiation in the schools of Oxford, and challenged the members of the University to argue with him on the subject. He was compelled by an order from the chancellor to discontinue that instruction. England was, however, the gainer by that prohibition; for he retired to his parish of Lutterworth, and issued from it his celebrated tract called *The Wicket*, which was the means of propagating his opinions through the length and breadth of the land. Now also he rolled away the stone from the mouth of the well. He threw all his energies into that translation of the Bible which has been a source of blessing to succeeding generations. We should have thought this work alone enough to occupy his energies. But we are amazed when we see during those last years at Lutterworth book after book, tract after tract, issuing from his parsonage, in which he lashes with his thrice-knotted scourge the mendicant friars,—his opposition to whom began in this period—or assails with the fiery

energy of his nature the doctrines of the Church of Rome, as, one after another, he discovers them. He applied the whole force of his mind to the investigation of truth. He worked out the doctrine of the real spiritual presence of Christ in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, seen by the true believer. At this time he anticipated Luther and our Reformers in opposing indulgences, works of supererogation, image-worship, invocation of saints, the worship of the Virgin Mary, and the doctrine of the Church of Rome in regard to penance, confession, and absolution. He brought forward also, but not so prominently as Luther, the doctrine of justification by faith; and asserted with Luther and the other Reformers the doctrine of original sin, and man's moral inability to turn to God—truths stated and errors condemned in the Articles and Formularies of the Church of England.

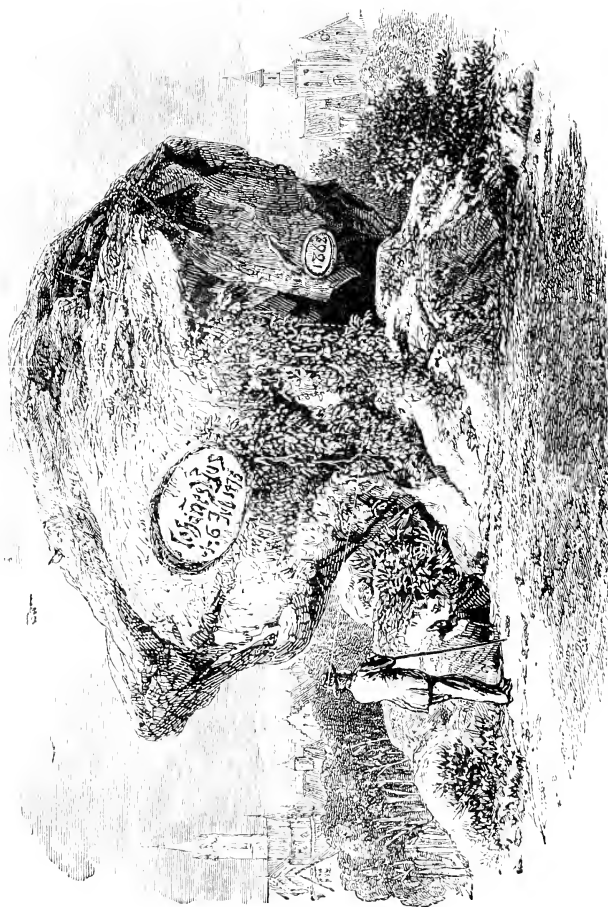
During the same period he was superintending the movements of that little band of 'Poor Priests' whom he employed to inoculate with these truths the minds of the people of England. The propagation of these opinions, partly by their means, prepared the way for the Reformation not only in England, but also throughout the continent of Europe.

John Huss, the Bohemian martyr, derived his opinions from the works of John Wiclif, which after the death of the latter were circulated in Bohemia. He was a great admirer of Wiclif, because he saw in

his writings an energetic zeal for reformation in the Church. Huss wanted something more than an outward reform in the Church. He had probed a deeper wound in the ecclesiastical body. He had declared that wicked popes, cardinals, and prelates are utterly without authority; that Christ is the Head of the Church; that the pope is His Vicar if he walks in His steps, but if not, he is the vicar of Judas Iscariot; and that excommunications unjustly pronounced must be disregarded.

Huss also, like Wiclif, opposed indulgences, and asserted that it is impossible for the priest to remit the sins of any, unless they are remitted by Christ. In opposing the assertion of the Romanists that the pope and the cardinals are the Church, he asserted with Wiclif that 'the Church is the collective body of those who are predestinated to salvation.' He also agreed with Wiclif in thinking that the superabundant endowments of spiritual persons should be taken away from them. But he only imperfectly followed him; for he did not give up his belief in transubstantiation, the communion in one kind, the worship of the saints and the Virgin Mary, doctrines which Rome had added to the faith.

In fact, the fundamental difference between Huss and his opponents was in regard to the limits to be affixed to the power of the pope. Huss and his friend, Jerome of Prague, became martyrs at Constance because, like Wiclif, they opposed the supreme



SITE OF JOHN HUSS'S MARTYRDOM.

ecclesiastical dominion which had so long governed the mind.

This perfidious and cruel martyrdom led to a sanguinary war, in which the Bohemians under John Ziska, the heaven-sent general, performed prodigies of valour; and was followed by the formation of a church, the members of which propagated through Germany the opinions of Wiclif and Huss, and thus prepared the way for the spiritual emancipation effected by Luther.

To gain a full view of the causes of the Reformation, attention must not be confined to the sons of thunder, who, glowing with devoted zeal, lifted up their voices against the errors of Romanism. A careful examination will serve to show us that some, who to the close of their days held the distinctive dogmas of the Church of Rome, unconsciously prepared the way for the Reformation. Those also must be taken into account who, not deemed worthy of a place on the pages of the historian, have contributed to the attainment of the same end. They have acted on Romanism like the tide which, rolling silently and ceaselessly against the massive fabric, undermines its foundations, until at length it lies a mass of ruins on the ground.

Students of history are aware that about the middle of the fourteenth century there lived an eminent man, Dr. Johann Tauler, who laboured in the Rhine country, but more especially at Cologne, Strasburg, and Basle, to remove the gross ignorance and superstition of his

fellow-countrymen, and to develop that life of the soul which is essential to the existence of vital Christianity.¹ Tauler had been brought up among the schoolmen, who engaged in subtle disquisitions on such questions as the distinction between the Eternal and the Temporal, the Infinite and the Finite,—questions which can never be answered till we enter a world of brighter light and more unclouded sunshine—and who neglected the vital and fundamental doctrines of Christianity.

This system undoubtedly trained and developed the intellectual powers of a few distinguished men, like John Wiclif, and prepared them for their work as pioneers of the Reformation; but it was utterly powerless to awaken the people from their spiritual insensibility. The effect was to hinder the progress of the Gospel, and to divert the minds of men from the simplicity of the truth as it is in Jesus.

As it is important to trace to its origin that influence which Tauler exercised not only on his contemporaries, but on succeeding generations, we must not omit to record his visit to Ruysbroek, of Grünthal,² one of those pure and high-minded mystics of Germany who

¹ For an account of Tauler, see Dr. Schmidt's *Tauler*, Miss Winkworth's *Life and Times of Tauler*, London, 1857; Milman's *Latin Christianity*, book xiv. c. vii.; and Ullmann's *Reformers before the Reformation*, i. 203–213.

² Grünthal is two miles from Brussels, in the forest of Sonjenbosch, at whose southern extremity is Waterloo, so famous in modern history.

were constantly labouring to withdraw themselves from scenes which address themselves to the senses, to walk as seeing and holding communion with Him who is invisible, and as mingling, even on earth, with the inhabitants of the world of glory. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were the age of mysticism in Germany.

Ruysbroek exhibited all the warmth of feeling of the other mystics, but entered his protest against that pantheism which led them to assert that whatever God wills in man is that to which he feels himself irresistibly compelled, and which, maintaining that God is the only existent and true Being, and that the creature is nothing, 'by an exclusive conception of man as a mere thinker, is developed into a system terminating at its summit in an absolute deification of self and of reason, and in a Titan-like defiance of God.'¹ This was the case especially with Eckart, who utters sentences about the union of the creature with the Creator which justify the grossest Antinomianism.²

But still Ruysbroek erred in thinking that he could here below lift up the veil which separates the created from the uncreated, and that he could gaze with un-

¹ For an account of German Mysticism, see Ullmann's *Reformers before the Reformation*, pp. 15-55.

² Tauler may have been one of Eckart's followers at Cologne. His views were not, however, at any time identical with those of his forerunner.

dimmed eye on the glory which emanates from God's throne. Thus blasted by excess of light, he created for himself an uncertainty. He saw something, without knowing exactly what was the object of his vision. Occasionally he uses language which may be said to be profane. He says, 'Our created is lost in our uncreated life, and we are translated into God. Lost in the abyss of blessedness, we see no distinction between ourselves and God.' But we cannot doubt that there was a deep earnestness in his mysticism, and that, when purified from all objectionable elements, it ultimately led to the development of the life of the soul, and to the removal of the errors and abuses of the ecclesiastical system.

Tauler's conversion, or rather enlightenment, was effected in the following manner.¹ When he was at the height of his popularity, a layman, a stranger, was observed at Strasburg, who for twelve weeks was a constant attendant on his preaching, and who listened to him with a thoughtful and searching attention. He perceived at once that he had great natural gifts, but that he had never come to a clear conviction of the depths of sin concealed in his own heart, or an apprehension of the full import of the entire surrender to

¹ We have the particulars of this change in *The History and Life of Dr. John Tauler*, a contemporary document. Professor Schmidt, by laborious researches among the old MSS. at Strasburg and Sarnen, has established that this history is a perfectly genuine and truthful production.

God which he preached. He was anxious to be the means of emancipating him from his bondage to error, because he saw that, in consequence of his peculiar gifts, he would, by God's blessing, contribute largely to the growth of godliness through Germany. He adopted the following means of accomplishing his object. He sent to him, and asked him if he would preach a sermon on the best way of attaining spiritual perfection. Tauler complied with his request, and preached on this text: 'Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile.' After his return from hearing it, he wrote out the sermon, and told Tauler that he should be glad to speak to him about it. He criticised it very severely, saying, 'Thou art yet in slavery to the letter; thou knowest not the life-giving Spirit; thou art but a Pharisee, though not a false one; thou trustest especially to one creature; thou trustest in thine own power, in thine own learning. Thou thinkest that thou seekest God's power, and seekest thine own. Thou needest to be taught by a Master who is above all doctors.'

Tauler was amazed and confounded. He saw that he had been bewildering his audience with scholastic subtleties; that he had endeavoured to gain the applause of his hearers by his Latin quotations, and by his skilfully worded syllogisms; and that he had not sought to promote God's glory in the salvation of the ignorant and perishing. He was, therefore, very willing to follow the advice of the stranger; to go

into retirement for a time ; to commune with his own heart, and in his chamber ; to follow certain rules of holy living ; and not to come forward again as a preacher till he was weaned from his spiritual pride, and had grown in conformity to the image of his Divine Master.

Tauler remained silent for two years, in spite of the entreaties of his friends and the taunts of his enemies. He was determined to mortify self, that God might be all in all. There were times when he gave way to despondency. But he was animated to persevere by hearing a voice inwardly saying to him in the watches of the night, when he was meditating on the passion of his Divine Redeemer : ‘ Stand fast in thy peace, and trust God, for He can heal the sick.’

At length, following the advice of the layman, he again came forward as a preacher. An enormous congregation assembled to hear him. We are told that the people were wedged in below so that they could not move, and clustered like bees where they had climbed above into every available space. Tauler, however, could not begin, but burst into a flood of tears, which moved the derision of his audience. He was obliged to come down from the pulpit without delivering his sermon. The layman came to him again, and exhorted him to strive to forget self, and once more to come forward as a preacher. This time he was completely successful. He preached on the text, a very favourite

one with mystical preachers, 'Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet Him,' and produced a wonderful impression. To use the words of the writer of the chronicle: 'It was a wondrous discourse; a torrent that seems to make me dizzy yet. As he was describing, more like an angel than a man, the joy of the Bride at the approach of the Bridegroom, a man cried out, "It is true!" and fell senseless on the floor. As they were about to bring him to himself, a woman among them shrieked, "Oh, stop, sir, stop! or he will die in our arms."' From that time he increased in wisdom and reputation, preaching in the large towns and throughout the country, and to such a degree that he was consulted on temporal as well as spiritual matters by all classes of people, who universally honoured his advice by obeying it.

The layman who produced this wonderful effect on Tauler was, as Professor Schmidt has discovered, Nicholas of Basle, one of a religious society called the Friends of God, mystics of the very highest class, who believed themselves to be in direct communion with the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Their union with the Deity was through wonders, visions, special revelations, and prophecies. They were faithful to the whole mediæval creed, holding the worship of the virgin and saints, purgatory, and transubstantiation. History records that Nicholas had wonderful influence over the minds of men, of which the conversion of Tauler is a proof. On one occasion he ventured to

reprove Gregory XI. for his indolence and for his sins. 'Gregory, at first indignant, was overawed by the commanding holiness of Nicholas.'¹ He lived many years after the death of Tauler, propagating with great success his peculiar views, and rebuking the sins of those in authority, and at length perished at the stake at Vienne in Dauphiny.

Tauler, after his conversion, for eight years continued his wonderful career as a preacher. He laboured with great success to apply Scripture to the hearts and consciences of his hearers. In his sermons, which were in the German tongue, and were no longer interlarded with Latin quotations, he taught the people with great earnestness superiority to the world, self-denial, humility, the complete surrender of the soul to God, and a faithful discharge of the duties incumbent upon them. The Bishop of Strasburg had laid his interdict upon the city because the inhabitants had taken part with the Emperor Louis of Bavaria in the religious war which he was carrying on with the pope, John XXII., for the supremacy in Europe. When that terrible scourge, the Black Death, visited Strasburg, Tauler issued several consolatory tracts, exhorting priests to administer the sacraments to the poor and ignorant before their decease. He and his companions also

¹ Note in Milman's *Latin Christianity*, book xiv. chap. vii.

visited those who were untended and unabsolved by the clergy, sustaining them with the hope of mercy through the Saviour; telling them that 'Christ died for all men, and that the pope cannot, by his interdict, close heaven against those who die innocent.' For this act of contumacy he was obliged to fly for his life from Strasburg. He took refuge at Cologne, and engaged in arguing against the pantheism just described, and in explaining the doctrines and duties of the everlasting Gospel. He returned to Strasburg only to die. He breathed his last in the year 1361, in the 71st year of his age, in the garden of a convent at Strasburg, having been sustained and comforted during his last moments by his sister, who had long dwelt, a pious nun, within its walls.

In Tauler's works opinions are found, flowing directly from the mysticism enunciated in them, which show that he was a genuine forerunner of the Reformation. The opposition just mentioned to two of the most important hierarchical institutions, excommunication and interdict, by itself shows that the character of a Reformer was strongly stamped upon him. Passages occur which show that he does not consider salvation as depending on obedience to the priest, but on a real work carried on within the soul.¹ 'Our righteousness and holiness, as the prophet saith, is but filthiness. Therefore must we build not on our

¹ Vaughan's *Hours with the Mystics*, book vi. c. 5.

righteousness, but on the righteousness of God, and trust, not in our own words, works, and ways, but alone in God.'

Speaking of the publican in the temple, he puts up a prayer that God would give him such an insight as that man had into his own nothingness and unworthiness. 'That,' he said, 'is the highest and most profitable path a man can tread.' 'Humility is indispensable to our perfection, since the loftiest trees run down their roots the deepest. We should not distress ourselves, if we have not detailed to our confessor all the short-coming and sin of our hearts, but confess to God, and ask His mercy. No ecclesiastical absolution can help us, unless we are contrite for our sin before God.' 'He who confesses the true faith of Christ, and sins only against the person of the pope, is no heretic.' 'His own works make not a man holy; how can those of others? Will God regard the rich man who buys for a pitiful sum the prayers of the poor? Not the intercession of the Virgin, nor of all the saints, can profit the unrepentant sinner.'

We must not, however, suppose that Tauler occupies the exact standpoint of a Lutheran Reformer. We cannot better state the difference between him and Luther than in the words of Vaughan in his *Hours with the Mystics*, a book full of valuable and curious matter on religious subjects. 'Both Tauler and Luther believe in substitution. The substitution of

Tauler is internal—God taking his place within himself. The substitution of Luther is external—when he believed on Christ, the Saviour associated him with Himself, and so brought him into sonship. So inevitable is the idea of *some* substitution, when the sense of sin is deep. Luther believes as profoundly as Tauler in a present, inward, living Saviour, as opposed to a remote historic personage, intellectually acknowledged. But the Son to whom Tauler is united is the uncreated essence, the super-essential Word, from the beginning with the Father. The Son to whom Luther is united is emphatically the God-man, as truly human, in all sympathy and nearness, as when He walked the Galilean hills. Both Luther and Tauler say, The mere history alone will not profit; Christ must be born in you. Luther adds, Christ begins to be born in you as soon as you heartily believe upon Him. Tauler adds, Christ is born in you as soon as you have become nothing.’

While, however, we admit this difference, we must place him in the army of Reformers before the Reformation. Surely one who laid man in the dust, and kept him there—who brought forward Christ, rescuing and purifying the stricken soul—who made human works as nothing, that God might be all in all—who deposed the priest from his rule in the heavenly kingdom, and erected it in the heart of every sincere worshipper, must be admitted to have prepared the way for Luther. The latter himself admits that this

was the case. He called Tauler 'a man of God.' He exhorts his friend John Lange to keep to Tauler, and writes to Spalatin:—'If it will gratify you to become acquainted with a solid theology in the German tongue, perfectly resembling that of the ancients, procure for yourself Tauler's sermons, for neither in Latin nor in our own language have I seen a theology more sound, or more in accordance with the Gospel. Melanchthon also assents to this opinion.'¹ Luther gives the same commendation to a remarkable work, *Theologia Germanica*, not written, as some suppose, by Tauler, but by an unknown person, about the year 1350. The theology is, however, the same as that familiar to us in his sermons. In the preface which he wrote to it in 1516, he says, 'Next to the Bible and St. Augustine, from no book with which I have met have I learned more of what God, Christ, man, and all things are.'²

We have in these words a proof that this work, and those sermons which had produced a wonderful impression during the lifetime of Tauler, were not forgotten after his death. By them he, being dead, spoke to many generations of his fellow-countrymen. They contributed to shape their spiritual destinies. Thus men trained in Tauler's school prepared the way for the Reformation, by leading men from a

¹ Ullmann's *Reformers before the Reformation*, vol. ii. p. 212.

² *Ibid.*, vol. ii. pp. 213-233.

reliance on outward observances to an inward and spiritual life. They continued, in fact, to appeal to God against the pope and the hierarchy, until they were merged in the 'noble army' which, in the sixteenth century, crowded round the banner unfurled by the great Saxon Reformer.

The institution of the Order of Brothers of Common Life contributed also to prepare the way for the Reformation. It owed its origin to Gerard Groote, the son of a wealthy burgomaster at Deventer. Gerard was born in that city in the year 1340.¹ As his parents saw that their son possessed great abilities, and as they were anxious that he should achieve distinction, they sent him to the University of Paris. He prosecuted successfully at Paris the study of theology and the canon law, a knowledge of which was an avenue to distinction in Church and State, and at the end of three years he left the University, having obtained the degree of Master of Arts. He was afterwards appointed to a professorship at Cologne, and to several canonries. He did not, however, adopt that style of living which indicated a conscientious wish to discharge faithfully his sacred duties, but wore gay clothing, dressed his hair, treated himself to the richest food and the most costly wines, frequented the

¹ A full account of Gerard may be found in Kettlewell's *Life of Thomas à Kempis*, vol. i. pp. 123-150, in a life of him by Thomas A'Kempis, and in Ullmann's *Reformers before the Reformation*, vol. ii. pp. 59-81.

temples of sin and the retreats of folly, and mingled freely in public amusements.

But he was soon awakened from his insensibility. One day a stranger, wearing the habit of a hermit, who had observed his great abilities, and was anxious that they should raise him to a commanding position as a benefactor of his fellow-countrymen, came to him at Cologne when he was amusing himself with a public game, and said to him, 'Why standest thou here intent upon vain things? another man thou oughtest to become.'¹ This solemn advice fell unheeded on his ear. He was not, however, to be left to perish in his iniquity. Other warnings came to him. A priest who visited him at Deventer, when he was attacked by a serious illness, told him, when he wanted to make his confession with a view to extreme unction, that he must put away his books on magic and astrology. He immediately complied with the demand. The impression thus produced was deepened by a visit from his former confessor at Paris, Henry de Khalkar, now the prior of the Carthusian monastery of Monchuysen, near Arnheim, who conversed with him in solemn tones on the subjects of death, judgment, and eternity. Thus he was led into a train of thought connected with mystical Christianity, at this time very popular at Cologne, which had exercised a fascinating influence over him, with the warnings previously addressed to

¹ Thomas à Kempis, *Vita Gerardi*, ii. 2.

him by the hermit and priest, and with his holy ecstasies after the spirit-stirring sermons of Tauler, the echoes of which he had heard resounding through the lofty arches of Cologne Cathedral; and he resolved at once to put away the evil of his doings, and to begin his great work of preparation for eternity.

Gerard immediately began to reform his mode of life. He gave up worldly amusements and convivial banquets, threw off his gay apparel, clothed himself in a simple dress, separated from his worldly friends, and retired to the Carthusian monastery over which his friend Khalkar presided. He thus exposed himself to scorn and obloquy. But he persevered. He spent three years in the monastery in prayer, meditation, and the study of the Scriptures and of the Fathers, especially the works of St. Augustine, and in a rigorous course of discipline.

His great abilities, the learning which he had previously acquired, and his late retirement, seem to have been judged sufficient to qualify him at the end of three years to come forth and do the work of an evangelist. Confident expectations were entertained that, as he had now a burning zeal to win souls to Christ, and as he would now preach, not only with his lips, but also by the silent eloquence of a holy life, he would be very successful in his public ministrations to the neglected multitudes around him. That expectation was fully justified by the event. Clad in

a coarse garment, he travelled through the towns and villages, exhorting his hearers to repentance and amendment. He was at this time only in deacon's orders. He preached on the love of God in Christ, and on the need of that inward life without which we cannot become members of God's kingdom of grace in this world, or of glory in that which is to come. He addressed listening assemblies of clergy, laity, and religious people. He and Tauler have been well called the Wesley and Whitefield of those days. Multitudes, pricked to the heart by his preaching, broke in pieces their idols of wealth, pleasure, or worldly vanity, and bowed down in penitence and prayer before the cross of Christ.

His success was increased by addressing the people in their native tongue. They listened to him with the greater attention because they saw that he preached to them not for pay, but because the burning love for immortal souls led him to endeavour to snatch them from the hell which was opening its mouth to receive them.¹ Attracted by his impressive sermons, they neglected their meals and their business, and came out to hear him. He often delivered in one day two or three sermons. When he saw that the flame had been kindled, he would endeavour to fan it into a brighter glow. He would continue his discourse for two or three hours, till he had made a permanent

¹ Ullmann's *Reformers before the Reformation*, vol. ii. p. 64.

impression. Such an awakening had not been seen during many generations. In many cases there was a lasting result. Large numbers were induced to give up stolen goods or money obtained unjustly, to live in chastity and temperance, to look down with a holy contempt on the pomps, pleasures, and vanities of this passing world, to dedicate themselves unreservedly to the service of the Redeemer, to live in this lower world as inhabitants of the world above, so that they might be admitted to the beatific vision, and hold converse with the ten thousand times ten thousand spirits who stand around the throne.

Gerard was too well acquainted with human nature not to feel assured that his rebukes of the clergy, whom he attacked with unsparing severity, would rouse against him a strong ecclesiastical opposition. The mendicants also were opposed to him, because he constantly rebuked them for spreading many false doctrines among the people, and on account of their shameless disregard of the rule of their founder as to voluntary poverty, which has already come before our notice. The result was that strong representations were made to the Bishop of Utrecht, who inhibited him from preaching. He submitted to the authorities of the Church, saying, 'They are our superiors, and we wish, as we ought and are bound, to obey their edicts.' This inhibition was for a time removed, but it was subsequently renewed, and it was continued till, on an appeal made to the pope, he was once more

allowed to lift up his voice in public. This permission was not, however, given till he had been discharged from his earthly warfare, and had entered his glorious rest. He died of the plague at Deventer, at the age of 44 years, in the same year as our immortal Wiclif, on the 20th of August, 1384.

Gerard always took great delight in advancing promising young men whom he found at public schools, in advising them as to the prosecution of their studies, in reading good books to them, and in training them for eternity. When deprived of the opportunity of influencing the multitude by his preaching, he determined to devote all his energies to this work. One of his first ideas was to assist them in earning money for their maintenance. His plan was to set them to copy books, especially the Holy Scriptures. Thus he not only supplied them with money, but also multiplied good books, of which, he states in a letter to a friend, he was 'avaricious, and more than avaricious,' and gained the opportunity of influencing them to lead a holy life, as well as to be useful in their day and generation.

The institution of a brotherhood was not suggested by Gerard himself, but by Master Florentius Radewins. Gerard was considering how, in consequence of the increase in the number of young men attached to him, he should provide for their maintenance, when Florentius, who was at that time Vicar of Deventer, came to him, and said, 'Beloved master, what harm

will arise if I and these clerks engage in writing, and put our weekly earnings into a common fund, and live together?' 'Live together!' replied Gerard, 'the monks would never allow it.' 'But what,' said Florentius, 'is to prevent us from making the trial? Perhaps God will give us success.' Then Master Gerard deliberated for a little while, and at last said, 'In God's name let us begin. I will be your advocate, and faithfully defend you against all who rise up against you.'¹ The young men, when Florentius made the proposal to them that they should place that which every one received weekly for what he wrote in a common fund, and live together, readily assented to it.

Then the devout Father Florentius, dwelling with his priests, clerics, and laymen in common life, prescribed, with the assistance of Gerard, the rules of living together in their community,—the modes, places, and times of labouring, watching, sleeping, praying, reading, and refreshing the body, together with other matters relating to their usefulness. Florentius, who became Gerard's successor, contributed more than the latter to the subsequent development of their institutions. He was a man of indefatigable energy, possessed a great talent for managing others, and an amiability which won the hearts of all who approached him. Similar institu-

¹ Ullmann's *Reformers before the Reformation*, vol. ii. p. 70.

tions were soon formed in various parts of Germany, partly through donations, partly because those who came to them threw their money into a common stock, and partly because some consecrated their fortune to the service of the community. Female Societies of Common Life were also established. The women were employed in sewing, weaving, devotional exercises, and the instruction of the young. They were all bound together by the spirit of love, humility, and obedience.

Their great object was to promote a reformation in the Church by the exemplification of practical Christianity. With this view they often conversed with one another. They stimulated the cold zeal of their brethren in the faith, exhorting them to spend and to be spent in the service of their Divine Master. They confessed their faults one to another. They endeavoured, by lectures and social exercises of devotion, to plant and keep alive the principle of the Divine life in the soul. They were not separated from the world, with which they held constant intercourse; for they well knew that the Satan from whom they fled in the crowd would follow them into the gloom of the monastery. They did not take upon themselves a vow binding for life. As continuance was an act of free-will, those who remained were with their whole heart members of the institution. Thus they became like a city set on a hill which cannot be hid. They preached, by their example, most earnestly and

persuasively to the ignorant around them. So that they hoped that many would hereafter rise up and call them blessed, to whose spiritual well-being they were not aware that they had been instrumental.

The brothers followed various trades,¹ but they laboured especially for the multiplication of copies of the Scriptures, and their diffusion, hoping that thus they should aid most effectually in promoting the spiritual regeneration of their native land. With the same object, they endeavoured to promote improvements in the education of youth. Gerard had, indeed, constantly impressed his young men with the conviction that they might understand all mysteries and all knowledge, but that if they ceased to look to Christ as the source of light, and life, and truth, their learning and gifts would be unprofitable to them, both here and hereafter. But still he would have them hold converse with those distinguished authors of ancient times who have moulded the taste and genius of mankind in every succeeding age of the world's history. He would have his educated disciples read Plato and Aristotle and the works of Seneca. He also required them to study geometry, logic, arithmetic, and grammar. He encouraged the study of medicine and jurisprudence.

But, above all, he directed them to study carefully the Holy Scriptures, and to know experimentally the

¹ Ullmann's *Reformers before the Reformation*, vol. ii. p. 92.

life-giving power of those words of wisdom and of truth which were able to make them 'wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.' 'Let the root of thy studies,' said Gerard, 'and the mirror of thy life, be first of all the Gospel, for in it is contained the life of Christ; next the biographies and sayings of the Fathers; afterwards the Epistles of Paul, and the Acts of the Apostles; and finally, the devotional works of Anselm, Augustine, and others.' The instruction given by the brothers was very different from the instruction given in town schools, where wages were exacted from scholars which only the most wealthy could pay, and was of a much higher tone than the teaching in the monasteries, where it was almost universally mingled with coarse and superstitious elements. The Brothers of Common Life, on the other hand, by their gratuitous instruction enabled the poor as well as the rich to obtain a knowledge of the arts of reading and writing, and very much improved education throughout Germany. They banished from the schools the Latin of the scholastic philosophy, which was utterly wanting in Ciceronian elegance; and not only introduced into them a purer style, but also laboured with so much zeal and efficiency for the study of Greek literature, that they hastened the coming of the time when, no longer shorn of its beams, the sun shed its radiance over the nations of Europe.¹

¹ Ullmann's *Reformers before the Reformation*, vol. ii. p. 102.

How did this institution prepare the way for the Reformation? An examination of Gerard's opinions might, indeed, at first lead us to the conclusion that it rather tended to keep it back. He held all the fundamental doctrines of Romanism. He daily attended mass, which he regarded as a propitiatory sacrifice; he laboured far more than other Romanists by mortifications to bring the flesh into subjection to the spirit, and he regarded priests as mediators between earth and heaven. But still there is no doubt that he inflicted a deep wound on his spiritual mother. He laboured to diffuse a knowledge of the Scriptures throughout his native country. He called on men to apply the whole force of their minds to the investigation of the meaning of God's Word, being fully assured that they would see flashes of light breaking forth continually from what were before dark sayings, and that a treasure of truth and happiness would be more and more unfolded to their astonished and delighted view. He instructed them to fix their eyes on the living, breathing image of Christ, as it is delineated in the Sacred Scriptures; to regard Him as the root of all Christian graces and virtues, and as the foundation stone of the spiritual life. He thought also that the rites of the Church ought to be reformed after the model of primitive Christianity.

While, too, he attached a superstitious importance to the office of a priest, and to the rites and ceremonies of the Church, he undermined the authority of

the former, and lessened the importance of the latter, by holding, like other mystics, the immediate contact of the soul with God, without their intervention. He directly encouraged the Brothers of Common Life to confess their faults one to another, thus forcing into the background that practice of confessing their sins to the priest which is one of the distinguishing features of the Roman Catholic system. But, above all, a visit which he, like Tauler, paid to the celebrated mystic Ruysbroek, was the means of impressing that character upon the efforts of the Brothers of Common Life which made them pre-eminently harbingers of the Reformation. They were thus led to direct their attention to the inward and spiritual life, the faith which worketh by love, so different from the coldness, and deadness, and formality of Romanism, the former of which appeared conspicuously in Luther and the Reformers, when they burst the bonds of Rome.

The Brothers of Common Life also prepared the way for the Reformation by their improvements in education, for thus the human mind was led to inquire into that system of error which the Church of Rome had imposed upon Christendom. But, above all, they prepared the way for it by constantly insisting on the importance of the mother tongue in their efforts for the evangelization of the people. Gerard of Zutphen, immediately after the death of Gerard Groote, wrote a treatise in which he strongly advocated the translation

of the Scriptures. He also insisted on the importance of prayer in the mother tongue. By their efforts in this direction, the brothers directly prepared the way for the spiritual emancipation of their fellow-countrymen.

The preacher became more earnest in his discourses, because he thus hoped to produce an impression on the heart and conscience of his hearers. The practice of praying in the native tongue served to kindle the flame of devotion in the hearts of the worshippers, and to elevate their thoughts to heaven.

Besides, as Ullmann observes,¹ 'The Reformation was the emancipation of the nationalities from the unity of Rome, in which, during the Middle Ages, they were entangled. Nationality cleaves to language, and the acquisition by the countries of Europe of a literature of their own was a first step towards their deliverance from Rome. The language of the Church being Latin, it strove to Latinize all other nations. As soon as the German preached and heard German sermons, read a German Bible, possessed a German theology, and prayed German prayers, the bond which connected him inwardly with Rome was severed, and inward separation could not but lead to outward separation also. The vindication of German independence was completed by Luther, who never could have become the Reformer of Germany and Europe, had he

¹ *Reformers before the Reformation*, vol. ii. 113.

not written, and spoken, and sung, and thundered in German.'

The cause of national emancipation in religion had been advancing for centuries before it reached the outbreak in Luther's time, and an especially large part of its advancement was due to the Brothers of Common Life.

The fact that Gerard's death took place in the same year as Wiclif's, naturally suggests a comparison between these distinguished men. Gerard agreed with Wiclif in opposing the mendicant friars, and in denouncing the luxury, the avarice, the simony, and the vices of the Church and Court of Rome. He thought, like Wiclif, that the prayerful study of the Bible was essential to the maintenance of the Divine life in the soul. He also agreed with him as to its universal diffusion, and he looked upon it as the arbiter of controversies.

But there was this difference between them. Gerard, while he agreed with Wiclif as to the importance of preaching to the people in the mother tongue, and while also he must have been anxious for a translation of the Bible into it, so that they might obtain for themselves instruction, comfort, and guidance, limited his efforts to the improvement, by means of the best manuscripts, of the Latin translation, previously extensively circulated, which was not completed till after his death. Wiclif, on the other hand, by his translation of the Bible into English, enabled

his fellow-countrymen to see that Rome had corrupted the faith once delivered unto the saints. The study of it, carried on in silence and solitude during the fifteenth century, prepared them to cast off the yoke of the oppressor. Wiclif trained a body of poor priests, who stood in the world's highway, and addressed to those around them the language of exhortation and remonstrance. Gerard also trained and assisted many poor clergy in preaching the Word of Life to those who were perishing in their iniquity. The teaching of both parties—transmitted in the case of Gerard through a regular line of teachers and preachers, and in the case of Wiclif from father to son—undoubtedly prepared the way for the deliverance of their fellow-countrymen from their spiritual bondage.

But while Gerard still held the dogmas of Romanism, Wiclif and his followers attacked such dogmas as transubstantiation, the sacrifice of the mass, the invocation of saints, the worship of the Virgin Mary, indulgences and works of supererogation. In fact, Gerard and his preachers only loosened the stones, while Wiclif and his poor priests sapped the foundations of that superstructure of error which the Church of Rome had compacted and consolidated, with the addition of fresh materials, through successive generations.

It might be supposed that an institution which had prepared the way for the Reformation would, after the time of Luther, be instrumental in promoting its

progress. But this was not the case. The rosebud was lost in the beautiful rose which loads the air with its fragrance. The morning-star must disappear before the effulgence of the ascending sun. The occupation of the Brothers of Common Life was gone, because printing had superseded transcription, and because their schools had been cast into the shade by other schools, which surpassed them in a wider range of studies, and in the adoption of the new means and appliances of intellectual improvement. Luther himself was anxious for their preservation, because they had aided in kindling the flame which was glowing throughout Germany. He opposed the abolition of their houses, 'because,' as he said, 'the brethren and the sisters *were the first to begin the Gospel among you.*' But he was unsuccessful in his object. They wished to remain neutral in that war between the two parties, on the issue of which depended the spiritual destinies of thousands of their fellow-creatures. But they found that neutrality was impossible. They were compelled to take their side. As a party they disappear from our view. They had, however, fulfilled their mission in the development of God's purposes; and many of them cast off their allegiance to Rome, and were found in the ranks of the Reformers.

The history and character of Thomas à Kempis, the celebrated author of the work on the *Imitation of Christ*, must now be considered, and an endeavour

made to trace his influence on the Reformation.¹ He was born at Kempen, not far from Cologne, in the year 1380. His father was a mechanic. His mother is mentioned particularly as a woman remarkable for her piety. They probably both owed their knowledge of Divine things to Tauler and those holy men who had laboured to propagate it through the country. His mother had endeavoured to sow in his heart the seeds of heavenly truth, and these, we are told, sprang up at a very early age. Both his parents must have observed that he possessed powers of a high order, or else, on account of their poverty, they would never have thought of giving him an education at a school of the higher class. They sent him to Deventer, where there was a school connected with the Brothers of Common Life. In the course of time he connected himself with the brothers, and became one of the most devoted members of the brotherhood.

In the year 1400, after he had been seven years at Deventer, he joined the order of canons regular of

¹ Mr. Kettlewell has given in his excellent work, *Thomas à Kempis and the Brothers of Common Life*, vol. i. pp. 12-20, the sources of information in regard to him. See also Ullmann's *Reformers*, vol. i. pp. 114-162. Dean Milman, in his *Latin Christianity* (book xiv. c. iii.), has given a rapid and brilliant sketch of him and his work, which, with one exception to be noticed, may be recommended. See also an excellent article on À Kempis in the *Churchman* for August, 1885.

St. Augustine, at the monastery of St. Agnes, not far from Zwolle. This was one of two institutions formed after the death of Gerard Groote, connected with the brotherhood, to which they might resort for counsel, encouragement, and support. Gerard was led by a visit at Grünthal to the celebrated mystic Ruysbroek, who lived, as we have seen, continually in the love and fear of God, not only to form an exalted idea of mysticism, but also by observing the simple, social, edifying life which was led at the monastery in the verdant valley, to conceive the design of instituting the order of canons regular in close union with the Brothers of Common Life. Death had, however, prevented him from carrying that design into effect. His successor, Florentius, had established the two institutions at Windesheim and Mount Saint Agnes.

Thomas à Kempis lived at this monastery to the great age of ninety-two. His life flowed on like a limpid stream, reflecting on its calm surface the unclouded sky. His little cell became, like the presence-chamber of God, beautified with the forms of the celestial powers. Here he saw a light which the world could not see. Here he heard a voice which the world could not hear. The gates of heaven were unbarred before him, and the songs of its inhabitants came stealing on his ear. Already he seemed to have escaped from this world of imperfection, and to be treading, a free spirit, that land of which the Lord

God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple. In this cell he engaged in those spiritual exercises, those Divine meditations, which connected him with eternity. He learned to look down with a holy disdain on the pomps, pleasures, and vanities of this passing scene.

‘It is the highest wisdom,’ he writes, ‘by the contempt of the world, to press forward towards the kingdom of heaven.’¹

The love of God and Christ was the object of his unceasing contemplation, and in it he found a pleasure far greater than any which is to be derived from the pursuits, however important, and however exalted, which occupy the time and engross the thoughts of a world which lieth in wickedness. He could pray, ‘Expand my heart with love, that I may feel its transforming power, and may even be dissolved in its holy fire.’²

The renunciation of self, the crucifixion of natural and worldly desires, the absorption of every passion in the enjoyment of God, the subordination of all feelings and actions to the promotion of the Divine glory, the patient endurance of evils and wrongs,—these were the objects towards which his efforts were unceasingly directed. While feeling that of himself he could do nothing, and that God must strengthen

¹ *The Imitation of Christ*, book i. c. i. sect. 4.

² *Ibid.*, book iii. c. iv. sect. 10.

him, he used every means for the attainment of his end. 'Rise early, watch, pray, labour, read, write, be silent, sigh, and bravely endure all adversity,'¹ were his rules of life, which he was constantly repeating. He lived in the atmosphere of the unseen world, holding converse with its mysterious and glorified inhabitants, and finding the greatest delight in anticipating its enjoyments.

It was not with him matter of general belief that his future home was very glorious. On the contrary, he had obtained glimpses of its glories, which, like the grapes of Eschol to the wanderers in the wilderness, served to assure him of an abundance in that good land towards which he was travelling. Thus he found heaven opened in his soul, and felt, when compelled to return to the earth, that life was nothing worth, but as it served to prepare him for the life to come.

The Brothers of Common Life and the canons regular aided in kindling and keeping alive the flame of vital godliness, amid the growing darkness of the age preceding the Reformation. 'They were a city set on an hill which cannot be hid.' We have a gallery of portraits of the inmates of the house of the brothers at Deventer, painted by À Kempis in brilliant colours, which have been finished with so much skill that we seem to have before us the living and breathing images of men remarkable for a sanctity

¹ *The Garden of Roses*, xiv. 2, p. 70.

seldom witnessed in this world of impurity and imperfection.

Here is Florentius, whose humble and gentle manners were truly the healing flowers for drooping souls, and whose sacred virtues supplied new strength and incitement. 'Arnold of Schoonhoven, of whom he says that he rose with alacrity at four o'clock, and on his bended knees uttered a short prayer, pouring forth his soul to God, and then hastened to the house of prayer, where he did not cease praying and meditating until the solemnities of the holy ordinance were entirely finished;' and John Kettel, of whom he writes that he was 'a most admirable example of humility and obedience to all that were in the house, subjecting himself to perfect mortification of the flesh and spirit for the love of the Crucified.' They often held stated conferences among themselves, and with their appointed superiors, on spiritual and heavenly things. Thus their hearts would often burn within them with such holy love and joy as could only be surpassed when they should see Christ as He is, and hold eternal fellowship with Him.

The lives of these and other holy men fired many in the different congregations of the brethren, in their own and succeeding generations, with the holy ambition of imitating their example, and became, when they appeared in another form, a source of blessing to thousands then unborn.

Such, then, were the influences which concurred to

produce the world-famous work, *The Imitation of Christ*. À Kempis has described in it his own life and the lives of his companions. The life which he lived led to the production of this book. He had Florentius chiefly before him when he wrote it. He had learnt from him especially to follow Christ.¹ The fact that the *Imitation* exactly agrees with the portraiture here brought before us, is one of the numerous proofs that he was the author of the former work. The controversy may now, in fact, be considered as closed.² Some say that the perfection at which we are instructed to aim in the *Imitation* is unattainable, while we are compassed about with infirmity, and weighed down by a body of sin and death. Thomas à Kempis, however, could say, 'I speak that I do know, and testify that I have seen.' Just as 'some flowers have more beauty than others, and of others which are beautiful some excel in colours, and others in sweetness, and others in form; and then again, those which are sweet have such perfect sweetness, yet so distinct that we do not know how to compare them together, or to say which is the sweeter; so these holy men exhibited, with varying changes of excellence, the reflection of those graces and virtues which shone forth with a

¹ See, for passages describing him and his companions, book iii. 53, 54, and book i. 25.

² Mr. Kettlewell has gone fully into this subject in *The Authorship of the Imitation of Christ*.

dazzling brightness in every word and every action of the Son of God. They show us what men *have* done, men can still do; they teach us to aim at higher attainments in love, knowledge, and holiness; and never to be satisfied till we stand before God clothed in garments of unspotted whiteness, like the angels and archangels, who stand around God's throne.

The high place which *The Imitation of Christ* continues, after a lapse of 450 years, to occupy in public estimation, proves its enduring value. Since 1470 nearly 4,000 editions have been issued, and it has been translated into forty-six languages. Age after age has passed away; many who, in the time of Thomas à Kempis, or in subsequent ages, dazzled the world by the splendour of their achievements, have long since been consigned to oblivion; kingdoms have risen, flourished, and are now forgotten; churches have gradually decayed, and have perished from the ace of the earth; but this book, though written by one of a different faith from many of its readers, though it does not attract by its eloquence, though it refers in some places to disputes and controversies which have long ceased to interest, has continued, and will continue, a favourite with readers of every rank and of every country. It holds this position because it is the clearest expression of the eternal yearnings of the soul—of its close questionings, of its anxious self-examination, of its reverential familiarity with the

Creator. We feel that this monk of St. Agnes has known the same conflict with temptation, the same weariness, the same longing for deliverance as ourselves ; and we learn from him to look forward to the coming of the time when our conflict with sin shall have an end ; when we shall no longer be tempted to wander from the presence of the Saviour ; when the soul shall be absorbed continually in the contemplation of the Divine perfections ; when we shall be knit together with the whole company of the redeemed in bonds which death shall have no power to sunder—associated with them in a friendship which shall for ever remain unchanged. We learn from him to ponder constantly and prayerfully the records of heavenly truth. We are led to seek the happiness springing from the constant endeavour, in dependence on God's grace, to subdue the corrupt passions and propensities of our nature, expressed in those words, ' If thou, O Lord, art present, all things are delightful ; and if Thou art absent, all things are wearisome : Thou makest the heart to be tranquil, and givest quiet peace and festive joy.'

What, then, was the influence of Thomas à Kempis on the preparations for the Reformation ? At first view, it would seem as if this pious mystic, dwelling far from the tumult of the world, whose whole soul was fixed upon communion with God, could hardly be considered a pioneer of the Reformation. This impression will be deepened when we hear that though

he did not bring forward the fundamental dogmas of Romanism, transubstantiation, purgatory, prayers and masses for the dead, the invocation of saints, and the worship of the Virgin Mary, he had not ceased to believe in them. He saw only indistinctly the doctrine of justification by faith. Purification by love constitutes the foundation of his religious system. Christ is with him more the image of God, and the example of a life in and with God, than the author of atonement and redemption. Love should constrain us to imitate every part of the Divine portraiture, and to aim continually at the attainment of those graces and virtues which adorned His all-perfect character. But he helped to prepare the way for the Reformation, because no teaching is better suited than his own to lead to the doctrine of justification by faith. The numerous failures of which we are conscious in our earnest endeavour to attain the high standard of excellence here brought before us, must serve to humble us in the very dust before our Maker, and thus to impress us with a deeper conviction that we must be indebted to the free grace of God for pardon and deliverance. The *Imitation* may be a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, because those failures will serve to lead us to value more and more that peace-speaking blood which alone can cleanse us from our moral defilement; to show us that we cannot render to the law that unsinning obedience which it so plainly requires; and that we must appear before

God clad in the robe of Christ's perfect righteousness, if we hope to endure unabashed the searching gaze of a God of infinite purity.

Mysticism, as exhibited in the *Imitation*, would in another manner prepare the way for the Reformation. It was quite purified from the profanity introduced into it by Eckart, and occasionally by Ruysbroek, and is reduced to a practical form. The great truth which it enunciates is the immediate and direct access of the soul to God. The great error of Romanism is that it regards the priesthood and other intermediates as the channels through which spiritual blessings are conveyed to the soul of the sinner. When, therefore, this book asserts that no priest is wanted to introduce us to the inner chamber; that the soul can go direct to God, and tell to Him the tale of its trials and sorrows; and that there is an audience-chamber when no ambassador is needed; a confessional where the soul confesses to and absolves itself;¹ and when it makes itself the spiritual teacher and guide on the way to the heavenly kingdom; then it emancipates man from his bondage to the priest, and brings him into the liberty with which Christ has made us free.

Moreover, the *Imitation* taught men to look to Jesus alone as their Saviour, to devote themselves unreservedly to Him, and to love Him, as we have seen,

¹ See especially *Imitation of Christ*, iii. 52, 55.

above every earthly object of attachment. It told men to trust only in Jesus in such words as the following: 'Whatsoever thou reposest in men out of Jesus is all no better than lost;'¹ and to place no confidence in prayers for the dead,² or in works of supererogation.³ Very little notice too is taken in it of prayers to the saints. In fact, the author seems to return to the teaching of the Church before Rome had corrupted and mutilated the Christian faith.

Again, mysticism in this book helped to plant in the Church that sense of inward religion to which the Reformation gave paramount importance. Romanism directed the attention to the immense value of the services of the Church, which she strove to make as impressive as possible by a gorgeous ritual and ceremonial, and to the Eucharist, without reference to the disposition of the worshipper, or of the individual who received the sacred elements. She led men to pay little attention to frames and feelings, while she assigned a disproportionate value to works and the external agency of the Church. Thomas à Kempis, however, in the fourth book, where he gives directions as to the right reception of the Eucharist, as well as in other books of *The Imitation of Christ*, teaches men that they might reduce themselves to a shadow by fastings and mortifications; that they might pour their wealth

¹ *Imitation*, ii. 7. See also ii. 8 and iii. 59.

² *Ibid.*, i. 23.

³ *Ibid.*, i. 24.

into the coffers of the Church; that they might erect magnificent buildings as a monument of their piety and liberality; that they might bow down in solemn adoration before the shrine; but that if they were living in any known sin, if they wanted the principles of faith or love to the Saviour, and the genuine spirit of devotion, no pardon of sin could be obtained, no grace acquired for the soul, and all their solemn services, all their mortifications, all their deeds of piety and charity, would profit them nothing when they stood before the tribunal of the Almighty.

He attached the greatest importance to the multiplication and diffusion of copies of the Sacred Scriptures, and to the careful study of them, with earnest prayer for Divine illumination.¹ He urged constant preaching of God's Word, and the training of the young not only for time, but also for eternity. We cannot, therefore, accept the statement of Dean Milman, that *The Imitation of Christ* is absolutely and entirely selfish in its aim, as in its acts.² That it could not have been the writer's object to fix the attention of the individual only on working out his own salvation, or to lead to the neglect of 'feeding the hungry, of clothing the naked, of visiting the prisoner,' is proved by the general tenor of his conduct. The very fact that he wrote this book for the purpose of raising

¹ *The Imitation of Christ*, book i., v., i., and iii., ii. 100.

² *History of Latin Christianity*, book xiv. chap. iii.

the standard of piety shows that his heart was inflamed with an ardent desire for the salvation of his fellow-creatures. The book, too, contains numerous exhortations and precepts on this subject.¹ His constant endeavours to kindle and keep alive the flame of piety in the hearts of others, either by exhortations when he was near them, or by letters when he was separated from them, designed to encourage them to persevere in the narrow way,² furnish a similar testimony.

We have the same evidence in his *Life of Florentius*, his great pattern, whom he especially commends on account of his holy and self-denying exertions for the good of the brethren and of those around him, and because he delighted in ministering to the wants of the distressed and the perishing, and in pouring the oil and wine of heavenly consolation into the wounded spirit.³ The earnest desire to ascend to a greater height of piety, the deepening of the love of God and Christ in the soul, led him to exert every effort for

¹ Mr. Kettlewell, in *The Authorship of the Imitation of Christ*, pp. 472-480, refers us amongst other passages to the following—i., 8, 13, 15, 16, 19, 22, 24, 25; ii., 4, 6; iii., 19, 42, 47, 54; iv., 9, 10.

² Kettlewell's *Life*, vol. i. p. 31 and ii. p. 325. Gieseler, in his *Compendium of Ecclesiastical History*, says: 'Among the small and peaceful circle of the religious mystics, no man exercised so important an influence as Thomas Hemerken, of Kempen.' V. p. 73.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. i. pp. 228-233.

the advancement of the spiritual and everlasting interests of men.

It cannot be denied that there are errors and objectionable passages in this book. They are, however, brought forward only incidentally, and have been very properly omitted in our English editions. The inclusion of them is rendered comparatively harmless by the abundance of truth which seems to controvert them. Thus the invocation of the saints appears to be out of place when we are reminded that Jesus is the only proper object of the sinner's confidence; and prayers and masses for the dead seem to be unnecessary when we are told not to trust in the prayers of others for us, but *now* to devote all our energies to the work of our salvation. Thus, while we have this passing reference in the work to portions of the system of the Church of Rome, we find that Æ Kempis had in the main, through the prayerful study of the records of heavenly truth, ceased to hold many of the errors which she had imposed upon Christendom, and was enabled to bring forward the essential doctrines of Christianity.

The book is, in fact, a marvel in itself, considering the corrupt age in which it was written. It was a beacon light to guide men across the deep, dark, troubled waters to the haven of everlasting rest. Many were led by it to fly to Christ for relief to their sin-burdened souls, and not a few were induced by its reading to stand forth the uncompromising champions

of the truth as it is in Jesus. Thus, by preparing the way for the Reformation, this book became a source of blessing to succeeding generations.¹ The seed which the writer cast into the ground sprang up and flourished and expanded into a mighty tree, 'the leaves of which were for the healing of the nations,' long after he who planted it was silent in the grave.

Other men, less known and less noticed than A Kempis, may be said to have prepared the way for Luther; such, for example, as Matthew of Cracow, Peter d'Ailly, and John Gerson, the last two connected with the councils, who, in the early part of the fifteenth century, exposed the deep and universal corruption of the Romish Court, the priests and pastors of their age. Gregory of Heimburg also, and Jacob of Jüterbock, who not only aided them in their work by suggesting a remedy, but who also attacked the dogma of the pope's absolute power and supremacy. Many independent men, too, in England, Bohemia, France, and even Italy, during the same period, under the same

¹ Ullmann, in his *Reformers before the Reformation*, vol. ii. pp. 155, 160, 161, and Schegel, in his *Philosophy of History*, pp. 394, 395, speaks very highly of A Kempis, as having in no small degree prepared the way for the Reformation. John Wesley, Dr. Chalmers, Dean Milner, and others of the same school, greatly valued this book. The great General Gordon carried it about with him. Mr. Kettlewell, in his excellent work, *Authorship of the Imitation of Christ*, pp. 453-490, shows that the charge of selfishness brought against it is unfounded.

conviction of the corruption in the Church, but especially in the Court of Rome, strongly advocated a reformation on the basis of the Church and hierarchy, and the necessity of some restriction to be applied to the papal power by the Church and her representatives.

John of Goch, who made his appearance as a public man in 1451, when he was about fifty years of age, and was the founder of a priory of canonesses at Mechlin, next comes before us.¹ We have no information as to the manner in which he was trained for his work. He was for twenty-four years confessor to the nuns at the institution at Mechlin which he founded, and died there in 1475. From his works we learn that he not only made Holy Scripture the basis of all Christian doctrine, but that also he gave great prominence to the doctrine of justification, not by works, but by faith in the atonement of Christ. He laid the foundation of that doctrine in a conviction of man's sinfulness, and of his absolute need of the blessings of salvation. He constantly insisted on Divine grace as the only source of pardon, and on love springing from faith in the Saviour, as the fountain of all true morality, which purifies the hearts of the followers of the Lamb. Though he thus opposed the errors of the Church of Rome, he does not seem to have excited the suspicion of

¹ For John of Goch, see Ullmann's *Reformers*, etc., vol. i. pp. 17-157.

the hierarchy. The more celebrated Romanists during the age in which he lived do not appear to have been acquainted with his writings. He seems, however, to have been at last recognised, about the middle of the sixteenth century, as one of the witnesses of the truth. The Council of Trent places his writings in the first class of prohibited books. Gieseler, in the present day, associates him with John of Wesel and with John Wessel, as the more prominent champions of the principles of Scripture and of Saint Augustine, who most effectively prepared the way for the Reformation.

He did not, indeed, like Wiclif and Huss, openly plant his artillery, and endeavour to batter down the strongholds of superstition. But he was one of those whose work, carried on in silence and obscurity, like the wave which rolls ceaselessly against the rocks, aided, by slow degrees, in undermining the Romish Church. His name is not emblazoned on the page of history, but it is written in records more durable than brass or marble, and through eternity it will not be forgotten.

John of Wesel came forward more prominently than John of Goch in his opposition to the Church of Rome.¹ He was born at Over-Wesel, between Mayence and Coblantz, some time in the first twenty

¹ For an account of John of Wesel and his work, see Ullmann, vol. i. pp. 217-374.

years of the fifteenth century, and was first of all a pupil, and afterwards a professor at the University of Erfurt. No doubt the visit of Nicholas of Cusa to Erfurt in 1451, at which, among other places, he preached indulgences and collected the gifts made by the penitent to the pope in return, strengthened his determination to oppose the doctrine. In the progress of this opposition, he plays one of the most important parts on the theological stage.

He asserted in his disputation against indulgences, 'that the penalty which God has imposed upon a transgressor no man can forgive; that the Holy Scriptures nowhere state that any priest, or even the pope, can grant an indulgence which shall liberate a man from the penalties denounced against him by God; and that the opinion of theological teachers regarding a treasure of the Church, accumulated from the merits of Christ and the supererogatory works of the saints, and committed to the charge of the pope, is one to which certain modest objections may be profitably made.'¹

We cannot tell whether he aided Luther in the development of his views. We can, however, see very clearly that he was at this time far in advance of Luther when he published his celebrated Theses. Luther only attacked certain abuses; but John of Wesel struck at the very foundations of the system.

¹ Ullmann, vol. i. p. 260.

Wesel seems to have penetrated to the very centre of Christianity. He refers always to Scripture as the source and standard of Divine truth, and is strongly opposed to whatever bears the impress of righteousness by works. 'The blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin,' and 'He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him.' These seemed to him truths so plain that he who runs might read them, and yet so powerful that the sinner needs no plea more availing to enable him to stand accepted before the face of his Judge. This was, as we know, the great doctrine brought forward by Luther and the Reformers.

Wesel laboured for many years as a teacher at Erfurt, Mayence, and Worms. In all those places he appeared as a determined opponent of the corruptions of the hierarchy, as the advocate of teaching which robbed of all value the entire system of ecclesiastical works, graces, punishments, and penances. He also wrote a work, the object of which was to show that the Church from its head to its members was infected with corruption, to which a strong remedy ought to be applied; and that the Papacy, as the chief seat of the disease, stood in need of a radical improvement.

We need not, therefore, be surprised to hear that he was summoned before a court appointed by the Archbishop of Mayence, on a charge of heresy. The result was that he was led to do violence to his con-

scientious convictions, and to recant his obnoxious principles, two years before his death in 1481.

This trial is important, because it appears that one of the charges against John of Wesel was that, to use the words of a German historian quoted by Ullmann, 'he paid a visit to Bohemia, on the invitation of a learned native, and was there seduced into the errors of the Hussites, which took their origin from John Wiclif.' We have evidence, too, that copies of John of Wesel's works were circulated in Germany.

John Wessel was one of the last and strongest links in the chain which connected Gerard Groote and the Brothers of Common Life with Luther. He made greater progress in the discovery and development of religious truth, and he was a more effective pioneer of the Reformation than any of his immediate predecessors. Luther himself was so astonished at some of the writings of Wessel that, in a preface which he wrote to them in the Leipsic edition, 1552, he says: 'All along I supposed myself to stand alone; yet I have preserved so much animation in the contest, as to be even accused of heat and violence, and of biting too hard. . . . But behold, in this state of mind, I am told that, even in these days, there is in secret a remnant of the people of God. Nay, I am not only told so, but I rejoice to see a proof of it. Here is a new publication of Wessel of Groningen, a man of admirable genius, and of an uncommonly enlarged mind. It is very plain that he was taught of God, as Isaiah prophesied that

Christians should be. . . . If I had read his works before, my enemies might have supposed that I had learnt everything from Wessel, so great a coincidence there is in our opinions. As to myself, I not only derive pleasure, but strength and courage from this publication. It is now impossible for me to doubt whether I am right in the points I have inculcated, when I see so entire an agreement in sentiment, and also the same words used by this eminent person, who lived in a different age and in a distant country.’¹ Melancthon likewise acknowledges that ‘on most of the main articles of the Evangelical Creed, Wessel’s views are the same that are taught now after the purification of the Church.’²

John Wessel was a native of Groningen, where he was born in 1419 or 1420. He lost his parents when he was young. He was sent, in accordance with his own wish, to the school of the Brothers of Common Life, at Zwolle. The fame of À Kempis attracted him to this institution. Some supposed that he had read the book on the *Imitation of Christ* before he came to Zwolle. But we have no evidence to show that this was the case. We have the testimony of his biographer, Albert Hardenberg, to the effect that he had before or afterwards read it, and that it had been the means of giving him his first vigorous

¹ Kettlewell’s *Life of Thomas à Kempis*, vol. ii. p. 319.

² Ullmann’s *Reformers*, etc., vol. ii. p. 579.

incitement to piety, and his first taste for true theology. Probably he went to Zwolle because there was no room for him in the monastery of Saint Agnes.

Wessel, soon after his admission to Zwolle, gave evidence of talents far above the average. He was, therefore, appointed, at an earlier age than usual, to an under-mastership, in accordance with a rule that those who held that office should be appointed from the school. He had previously given instruction to the students. We cannot discover that he made much progress in literary or scientific knowledge during his residence at Zwolle. The improvement of his mental powers and the acquisition of positive knowledge were due to his own exertions during a later period of his life. His residence there was the means of developing that fervid and deep-toned piety, and of laying the foundation of that knowledge of spiritual things for which he was afterwards distinguished. Certain bodily infirmities, a weakness in his eyes, and a distorted foot, induced him to look inwards, and served to develop that manliness of spirit and that independence of character which led him to come forward and oppose the corruptions, the abuses, the superstitions, and the doctrines of the dominant Church.

His constant intercourse with A Kempis, which he zealously sought, as well as his study of the *Imitation of Christ*, must have contributed greatly to the right

direction of his energies.¹ Wessel was at this time about twenty years of age, and À Kempis sixty. He had once the wish to take up his abode permanently at Saint Agnes, and probably consulted À Kempis on the subject. But he soon abandoned that design, on account of the excessive superstition of the inmates of the monastery, and went to the University of Cologne.

The truth is that the minds of À Kempis and Wessel were cast in a different mould. À Kempis was more a man of contemplation than of action. He carefully abstracted his gaze from this world's glittering vanities, and closed his ears against the clashing of the swords, the tumult of the theological battle-fields.

Wessel, on the other hand, was essentially a man of action. He wished to bare his bosom to the strife, and to plunge into the thick of the battle. He burned with the desire to sweep away the abuses and superstitions in the Church, and to labour for the regeneration of society. His plan was to master languages, in fact, every branch of learning, in order that he might be better able to accomplish his object.

This reforming spirit seems to have displayed itself in Wessel at an early age. À Kempis was no less zealous in fasting than he was in other parts of discipline. Once when he was inculcating this duty on

¹ Hardenberg's *Life of Wessel*.

Wessel, he received from him the answer, 'God grant that I may always live in purity and temperance, and fast from sin and vice!' As the biographer of Wessel relates, Thomas, on hearing this and similar remarks, was filled with wonder, and took occasion to change some passages in his writings, which now show fewer traces of superstition. But this statement cannot be correct, for we find that in 1425, when Wessel could not have been more than five or six years of age, a copy of *The Imitation of Christ* was deposited in the house of the Brothers at Windesheim, differing very little from the copy now recognised as coming from the hand of Æ Kempis. Still, the one may have exercised an influence on the other in the development of their views on the fundamental truths of Christianity. In later life Wessel delighted in revisiting the home of his early manhood, and in renewing the delightful intercourse which he formerly held with the presiding spirit of that monastic institution.

Wessel felt to the end of his days his obligations to Æ Kempis. He remembered that Æ Kempis had planted in his mind love to the Saviour, anxiety to attain a growing conformity to His image, and to subordinate every wish and purpose to the promotion of the Divine glory in the salvation of his fellow-creatures, from which he had proceeded to higher degrees of love, knowledge, virtue, and holiness. 'Truth,' says Wessel, 'has been the object of my pursuit since the days of my childhood, and is more

so now than ever, because through truth alone lies the way to life.’

Advancing still further in his spiritual career, he was determined to discover on what human authority traditional maxims and old superstitions rested, and to unmask those multiform delusions with which the Church of Rome had endeavoured to impose on the credulity of mankind.

We shall now glance at a few of those doctrines, afterwards brought forward prominently by Luther and the Reformers, which Wessel elaborates directly or indirectly from the teaching of Thomas à Kempis. Like him, Wessel clave with his whole soul to Scripture. He would have every man apply it to the purpose of his own correction and instruction in righteousness. He says, ‘The man who, in reading the Bible, does not daily learn to think less of himself, and does not grow in self-dislike and self-humiliation, reads it not only in vain, but even not without danger.’ He looked upon it as the true, vital, and only reliable fountain of Christian faith; and, speaking of the pope, observes, ‘The will of the pope and the authority of Scripture by no means stand on the same level; for the will of the pope must be regulated by the truth of Scripture, and not the truth of Scripture by the will of the pope.’ Like À Kempis also, he looks upon love as the confluence of all that is great and glorious in Christianity. The love of God and Christ to man, Wessel holds to be the chief subject and proper power of the Gospel.

‘Love,’ he says, ‘waits for no command; for he does not love at all who waits until he receives, and only acts after he has received, an order.’¹

And again, in a beautiful passage, he says, ‘What can I give to Him who gives all to me? The violet of spring exhales its fragrance to the fostering sun; the winged gnat sports in its beams; but to Him who is my spiritual Sun, what can I give in return? In truth, to render Him anything of my own is impossible. The only thing which I can give is a grateful heart. So, then, God, I am Thine, and all within me only exists because Thou hast willed it so.’

So also Wessel, like A Kempis, lays great stress upon the loving contemplation of the life and passion of Jesus, as we see very plainly from the fact that he not only has composed several works occupied with it, but also constantly reverts from time to time to the subject.

Wessel, on the doctrine of justification by faith, was in advance of Wiclif or any of his predecessors, and by the plain expression of his views may be said to have paved the way for Luther and the band of earnest spirits associated with him, who attached to that doctrine paramount importance. On this subject he partly develops the teaching of A Kempis, and partly also advances farther than his great spiritual

¹ Wessel's *Letters*, p. 861.

master. He shows that the love of Christ which filled the heart of Æ Kempis is the result and evidence of a living faith. He writes, 'As the source of love is faith, so is faith also acceptable for the sake of its offspring.' And again, almost in the words of Luther, he writes, 'The law inculcated perfection, but it did not conduct us to the perfect. Has, then, the Gospel done so? It has. And whom has it conducted? Every one who *believes*; for to every one who believes, Christ is the end and fruit of the law for righteousness, because it is He who gives to all who believe in His name power to become sons of God. By faith in the Word, which is God, they connect themselves with the Word. . . . Whoever is so, becomes one spirit with Him, righteous with the Righteous One, and holy with the Holy.'

On every other subject, Wiclif, who lived a hundred years before Wessel, and had not the same advantages as the latter, is the only one of his predecessors who anticipates his conclusions. Wessel denies the competency of the pope to impart forgiveness of sins, because such forgiveness can only proceed from one who is perfect. If, however, the pope be not morally perfect, neither can he be infallible. With regard to the Church, we find that (agreeing here with Wiclif) he holds it to be the communion of saints, of persons not yet sanctified, and of persons already perfected, 'who are connected with Christ by one faith, one hope, one love.' Ages may intervene, and oceans

heave between them, but they form one body; one pulse of spiritual life beats throughout the whole. In regard to oral confession, Wessel attached little importance to it, if there were no real repentance. He has here followed À Kempis and the Brothers of Common Life, who looked upon confession of faults among themselves as a more excellent way. He likewise denies that confession is absolutely necessary to obtain forgiveness. Where repentance is in the heart, the sins are forgiven, because they are confessed.

A priest may declare the Word of God for the sinner's conversion, but the inward mystery of really forgiving sin is the work of God. Again, he is angry because oppressive works of penance are imposed on a true penitent, while the cheering announcement of grace is not given to him. He appeals to the example of the Prodigal's Son. 'Him the father received at once. He did not blame, or upbraid, beat, or put him into prison; but ran to meet him, kissed and embraced him, wept for joy, clothed him with a robe, ordered shoes to be put on his feet. What papal indulgences were necessary to this returning penitent? Full return to God, therefore, is the only worthy fruit of penitence, and conversion of itself is satisfaction.'

He does not scruple to call indulgences a pious fraud; nay, with still greater warmth of feeling, 'an error and a lie.' Although Wessel, like Wiclif, admits the existence of a purgatory after death, he expresses,

like the latter, an opinion on the subject different from that entertained by the Romanists. He says, 'The fire of purgatory is that which rather purges than punishes the stains of the inner man that accompany us even after our departure from the body.' 'It is such a condition that, if we knew it, we should rejoice. It follows that we are not in misery, not under the rod of the tormentor.'

On the subject of the Eucharist we notice a divergence of his views from those of Luther. The latter held not only that the body of Christ is present throughout the world, but that the worthy and the unworthy alike partake of it,—the first to their salvation, the second to their condemnation. Wessel, on the other hand, says, 'There is between the sacramental and the spiritual eating this difference, that the former without the latter is unprofitable, nay, even worketh death; whereas the spiritual eating is always profitable and tendeth to life. 'To feed on the body and blood of Christ in this way (by faith and love) is better than were we ten thousand times to receive the Sacrament at the altar from the hand of the priest with insensible hearts and cold affections, that we might be in the state of grace. The language of Wiclif, and of Zwingli, the great Reformer of Switzerland, on this subject, exactly agrees with the words used by John Wessel. Zwingli has, therefore, been supposed to have borrowed his opinion from Wiclif.

It was largely owing to À Kempis that Wessel became one of the most effective pioneers of Luther, Zwingli, and the Reformation. We have seen in the case of Luther and Melancthon that his opinions were known beyond his native country. We know that from 1452 to 1489, the year of his death, he resided at Paris, Rome, Heidelberg, and Groningen, engaged in sowing the seeds of Divine truth in the minds of the young; and we have distinct evidence that, after his death, many whom he had trained for eternity went forth, especially from the last two places, propagating his opinions and making known his books throughout Germany and the Netherlands. Wiclif has justly been compared to the day-star, which ‘flames in the forehead of the morning sky,’ the harbinger of the approaching sun. Wessel may be likened to the first luminous rays gilding the mists in the early morning, the herald of the king of day, who shall soon burst through and scatter them, and shall pour a flood of light over forest, and mountain, and river. Both occasionally gave way to despondency, when they saw the abounding iniquity which prevailed on all sides of them. But as Moses, from the summit of Pisgah, saw the promised land expanding in all its beauty and fertility, but was not permitted to tread its valleys and gardens, so Wiclif and Wessel were sustained by the prospect of a time when the moral wilderness around them should rejoice and blossom as the rose; when ‘the flowers should appear on the earth; the

time of the singing of birds should come, and the voice of the turtle should be heard in the land ; when the fig-tree should put forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell.'

CHAPTER V.

THE INCREASING BRIGHTNESS BEFORE THE REFORMATION.

AN expectation very generally prevailed at the beginning of the sixteenth century that Europe would be shaken by a violent tempest. A portentous stillness pervaded the atmosphere of the Church, like the calm in the realms of nature which often precedes the bursting forth of the hurricane. Men could not, indeed, foresee the nature of the convulsion, nor the violence with which it would rend asunder the massive structure of Romanism; nor the rapidity with which the builders would erect on the ruins buildings remarkable for the harmony of their proportions and the chaste beauty of their architecture. They could, however, see clearly, on looking through the ages, that the efforts of mendicants, councils, and poets to reform the Church had failed, and that they had only intensified the evil which they were designed to remedy.

The corrupt state of the Church before the Reformation is acknowledged by a very distinguished Roman Catholic writer, who might not be supposed too willing to admit it. 'For some years,' says Bellarmine, 'before the Lutheran and Calvinistic heresies

were published, there was not (as contemporary authors testify) any severity in ecclesiastical judicatories, any discipline with regard to morals, any knowledge of sacred literature, any reverence for Divine things; there was not almost any religion remaining.' 'No competition,' says a good Bishop of Worms in the fifteenth century, 'for any situation, however low, or by any candidate, however poor, meets with success at Rome unless a ducat be first paid, and paid to the very last penny. This method of appointing to offices is a chief impediment to the promotion of able and honest men, for they are restrained by good sense and shame from coming forward. Scarcely will you find a groom or any mean unworthy fellow who does not hold one or more spiritual offices.' 'Concubinage,' says the same writer, 'from the commencement of the fifteenth century, is publicly and formally practised by the clergy, and their mistresses are as expensively dressed and as respectfully treated as if their connection were not sinful and indecent, but honourable and praiseworthy.'

In fact, when we consider not only these vices, and this corruption, but also the mad lasciviousness, the lawlessness, the chicanery, the faithlessness to friends, which everywhere prevailed, and the ignorance and degradation of the people, it becomes evident that society and the Church were rotten to their very core. These are the words of a Roman Catholic writer, quoted by Dean Hook, 'The epoch (the fourteenth and

fifteenth centuries) of which we speak was an eclipse—a very Egyptian darkness, worse than Chaos or Erebus; black as the thick preternatural night under cover of which our Lord was crucified.’

A comparison of the popes of this period with Gregory VII. and Innocent III. shows that the Papacy was shorn of its former might and majesty, and affords additional proof of the utter corruption of the Church. Gregory had laboured to make it the arbiter of the spiritual and temporal destinies of Christendom. Innocent III. had achieved great success as a statesman and conqueror. Their ambition and arrogance are to be strongly censured. But still, there was a grandeur in the design of compelling men to cease from their dissensions which would command admiration were it not for the idea that they wished to gratify their love of power by planting their feet on the necks of the prostrate monarchs. The popes of the fifteenth century gave a very plain proof that they had not the same power as the giants of former days, and that they had sunk to the depths of degradation by limiting their ambition to the aggrandizement of their families, and to the consolidation and enlargement of their Italian principality. To dissolve a hostile confederacy, to surpass in craft a disciple of Machiavel, to heap up around them piles of wealth, to make their sons the owners of splendid palaces, the possessors of vast estates, the sovereigns of principalities—these became, from the death of Pius

II. in 1463, to the time of Luther, the objects of men who, if their lot had been cast in any former age, would have sought to bind kings in chains and nobles with links of iron.

The popes during this period surpassed one another in wickedness. Alexander VI. is the most conspicuous name in the annals of infamy. He plunged without scruple and remorse into the practice of every vice and the perpetration of every crime. The papal palace became the scene of Bacchanalian orgies. Licentious songs sounded through its banqueting hall. The pope committed the greatest crimes for the advancement of his children. The highest dignities in the Church were conferred on the best bidders. Sixtus IV. perpetrated deeds of cruelty and violence that he might obtain for his son the lordship of Imola and Ferrara. Innocent VIII. had the effrontery to recognise publicly seven children, and to make them pensioners on the apostolical treasury. Julius II. was haughty and intractable, restless and ambitious. The tumult of the battle-field was music in his ears. At the siege of Mirandola he was constantly in front of his soldiers, animating them to deeds of noble daring.

These vices and crimes were very injurious to the best interests of the Roman Catholic Church. In the tenth and eleventh centuries the crimes and impurities of the popes had failed to shake the Papacy, because they were perpetrated in a time when 'darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people.'

But now, in the full blaze of day, the loathsomeness and pollution of the sepulchre were laid bare to the gaze of the nations. The armies of Charles VIII., on their departure from Italy, published their crimes in every land ; the public press propagated them through Europe. Erasmus, whose works were read everywhere, lashed with his thrice-knotted scourge the hoary perpetrators of those deeds of darkness. Preachers of righteousness, like Savonarola, lifted up their voices in indignant denunciation of their wickedness. The consequence was that the splendour which the learning and virtues of Nicholas V., and the earnest zeal of Pius II., had shed over the Papacy, gradually faded away. The world stood aghast with horror at the contemplation of deeds as bad as any perpetrated in the darkest period of Pagan antiquity. Men could not believe that those could be infallible guides who trampled on all laws, Divine and human, and set at naught all considerations of right and decency in their anxiety to sweep away from their path whatever stood between them and the attainment of the object of their desire. These enormities were a heavy blow to the Papacy, and contributed to prepare the way for the Reformation.

We have in this history a parallel to the state of things which prevailed just before the coming of Christ. The inhabitants of Rome were steeped in vice and sensuality. The people were more idolatrous in their habits, and more corrupt in their practices, than

during any preceding period of the world's history. Proof was at this time given, in the existence of the worst form of the moral disease at a time when the intellect had achieved some of the proudest triumphs known among the writers of antiquity, that the efforts of the philosophers to reform the world had failed of the wished-for success, and that man can by no means of his own devising accomplish this object. Thus, notwithstanding the various efforts to reform the Church and the world which have come before us, the moral pollution of Christendom had become continually greater, and men stood aghast at the revolting features which it exhibited.

Many seemed to despair of the success of any attempt to effect the regeneration of Christendom. There was then found a general conviction of the need of the proffered remedy. The cup of indignation became full to the very brim. An earnest desire was awakened in the minds of a large proportion of the inhabitants of Europe for the cleansing of the polluted sanctuary. Then God interposed for the recovery of the plague-stricken sufferers.

During the latter part of the fifteenth and the early part of the sixteenth centuries witnesses of the truth were to be found in every land who lifted up their voices against the corruptions of the Papacy. Among them has been placed the Florentine monk, the celebrated Jerome Savonarola. Some have described him as a heaven-commissioned prophet, as a wonder-work-

ing saint, as a holy, single-minded Christian preacher, labouring for the temporal and eternal welfare of the immortal multitudes around him. Others, again, have spoken of him as a hypocritical impostor, as a deluded



SAVONAROLA.

fanatic, as a turbulent demagogue, who desecrated his sacred office by plunging into the strife of civil politics.

Burning with a holy indignation against the infamous

Alexander VI. and the corrupt ecclesiastics of the age in which he lived, Savonarola laboured zealously to purify the Church, and to cast vice from its throne in the high places of Christendom. The eloquent preacher, the secret of whose wonderful power we discover in the spirit-stirring sermons which have been transmitted to our times, was influenced by a disinterested regard for the spiritual welfare of his fellow-citizens, when he persuaded them to cast into the flames their costly treasures of art, ornaments, and letters; to break in pieces the golden idols, before which they bowed down in solemn adoration; to assume a sanctified demeanour; to banish sensuality from the walls of their city, and to close those halls where Pleasure erected her throne, and assembled constantly crowds of her worshippers.

He was, however, aiming at a monkish reformation, and if he had been successful he would have converted Italy and the rest of Europe into one vast cloister. He did not hold Luther's doctrine concerning justification, the communion in both kinds, indulgences, and human traditions. Nay, he would have been deeply grieved, if he could have foreseen that the effect of Luther's preaching would be to cause half of Europe to cast off its allegiance to the Roman Pontiff. But still, by his eloquent diatribes against Alexander VI., whom he justly described as a monster of wickedness, and whom he asserted to be no pope; by his denunciations of the vices of the clergy, and by the zeal

with which he laboured for a reformation of manners, he prepared the way for the great Saxon Reformer.

Erasmus was born in Rotterdam on Oct. 28th, 1467. Notwithstanding his poverty, his want of books, and of masters to instruct him, and an incurable malady, he had become, in the early part of the sixteenth century, the greatest scholar, and, in some respects, the greatest divine on this side of the Alps. He was equal to or surpassed the most distinguished men in Italy. In wit and satire he was absolutely unrivalled. Princes were constantly competing for the honour of his residence in their dominions. More visits were paid to Erasmus during his lifetime than to the shrines of any of those saints whom the Church of Rome has taught her members to regard with a superstitious reverence.

Erasmus aided the Reformation by promoting the study of the writers of antiquity, which strengthened the intellect, and led it to inquire into every part of the Roman Catholic system. He prepared the way for that reformation of the Church which others conducted to a successful issue, by being the first to give an improved version of the Greek original of the New Testament, as well as a better translation into Latin. He thus rescued from the Church of Rome many passages which in the Vulgate favoured her dogmas, and afforded a guide to those who very soon enabled all orders of the community to 'read in their own tongues the wonderful works of God.'

Erasmus also aided the progress of the Reformation by attacking with the weapon of satire the vices, the follies, and the superstitions of the age in which he



ERASMUS.

lived. In all probability, if he had condemned them in a graver form, a cry of indignation would have rung through Europe. But his sportive wit insured his

impunity. The authorities in Church and State, even though they might be fully sensible of the danger of his opinions, could not place under ban and anathema works which the world received with undissembled merriment. In the *Praise of Folly*, one of the most remarkable satires which the world has ever seen, he ridiculed the ignorance, the absurdities, and the formalism of the monks, and inveighed against them on account of their wickedness, and on account of their encouragement of superstition; in the same work, and in his *Colloquies*, he did not conceal his scorn for the superstitions of the age, and, afterwards changing his playful wit for indignant satire, he assailed popes, monarchs, cardinals, and bishops with his merciless raillery.

Erasmus may be considered a connecting link between the Brothers of Common Life, À Kempis, and the Reformers. He was taught in the school of the former at Deventer, where, eighty years before, À Kempis had studied in the schools of Florentius; and it was from the brothers, who had the *Imitation of Christ* constantly in their hands, that Erasmus obtained his first views of religion. Like them, he did not accept the distinguishing doctrine of the Reformation; asserting that faith in Christ meant to aim at virtue only; to imitate those graces which appeared in His all-perfect character, and proclaimed the indwelling of the Godhead. But in other particulars he advanced beyond their teaching. He

ridiculed, for instance, in the *Praise of Folly*, those who ‘derive comfort from false pardons or indulgences, and who measure the spaces of purgatory as with an hour-glass; who, having cast down a small piece of money, taken from the vast amount which they have gained unjustly, think that all the guilt of their life is purged away.’ Again, he speaks of the folly of worshipping a little image marked with a coal on the wall in the same manner as Christ Himself. Take, again, the powerful passage in which our Lord describes the appearance of monks on the judgment-day. ‘Whence comes this new race of Jews? I acknowledge one law as really crime, of which I hear nothing. Formerly, when on earth, without a parable, I promised My Father’s inheritance, not to austerities, prayers, or fastings, but to faith, and the offices of charity. I do not acknowledge those who make much of their good deeds.’ He had also, in his *Colloquies*, derided the worship and adoration as well of images as of relics. In the *Shipwreck*, while one addressed himself with loud cries to one saint, one to another, there is one calm person shown as the only true Christian among them, who addressed himself to God alone. He evidently thinks little of the worship of the Virgin Mary and the saints; but he thinks much of the imitation of their holy and blessed example.

‘No worship,’ he writes, ‘is more acceptable to Mary than the attempt to imitate her humility; none is more pleasing to the saints than the laborious

endeavour to exhibit in your life a transcript of their virtues.' 'The more you love Christ, the more will you hate your sins . . . I would rather that you should once hate your sins truly within, than *ten* times confess them in the language of abhorrence to a priest.' When we consider these and many more passages which might be given, we must admit that there is some truth in the charge of the monks: 'Erasmus laid the egg, and Luther hatched it.'

The sale of his works was a marvel in the history of literature. When we remember that the number of readers in those days was a mere handful, as compared with the number at the present time, and that the resources of printing establishments were very different from what they are now, the sale of his works was far greater in proportion than the sale of those of the most popular author of the age in which we live. His opinions flew on the wings of the press throughout Europe. The *Praise of Folly* and the *Colloquies* were in every palace, in every house, in every school, and in every monastery. The former work in a few months went through seven editions. Twenty-seven editions were published in his lifetime. A Spanish friend informed Erasmus that his *Colloquies* were in Spain flying through the hands of men and women. A bookseller at Paris, on giving out that the latter work was prohibited, sold about 24,000 of one impression. Both these works were translated into many of the languages of Europe. The wit, too, with which his works were

seasoned, became like the honey which, as the poet Tasso says, nurses place on the edge of the vessel, that children may be led to take the healing medicinal draught. Many Romanists, attracted in this manner, who, not caring for the wit, read his works on account of the learning and reputation of the author, when they would not have read those of a leading Reformer, learnt from him the errors of the Church of Rome, became the most zealous in conveying a knowledge of them to others, and thus promoted the progress of the Reformation throughout the continent of Europe.

But Erasmus could never have led the assault on the confederated legions of Rome. His schemes were not at all calculated to accomplish the end designed by them. He hoped that the human race, refined by polite learning, and enlightened by the knowledge of the Scriptures, would shake off the superstitions of the Middle Ages, and would pursue their onward course of moral and spiritual improvement. On this point his friends, Colet, the Dean of St. Paul's, and Sir Thomas More, the author of the *Utopia*, agreed with him. They agreed with him also in his opposition to the scholastic philosophy, to the formalism of the monks and others, and in his determination to make religion an actuating, energizing principle. Colet had taught him to look on Scripture as a connected whole, and to direct the envenomed shafts of ridicule against the schoolmen, who fixed attention on single verses,

which they employed in weaving their absurd theological subtleties.

‘Thus then Erasmus, that great injured name,
The glory of the priesthood, and their shame,
Stemmed the wild torrent of a barbarous age,
And drove those holy Vandals from the stage.’

More also agreed with him in regard to the doctrines condemned by Erasmus, which the former derides in his celebrated work, *Utopia*. In these respects, then, they aided him in preparing the way for the Reformation. Their scheme was, however, a mere chimera. The mere study of Homer and Virgil could never be the means of regenerating the Church. Mild measures had been employed for ages, and they had failed. Erasmus, however, was not satisfied that a reform could not be effected in this manner. He persevered in his exhortations and remonstrances. When, however, he found that this advice proved of no avail, he thought it better to wait till the Reformation could be effected without civil and religious convulsions, which, he thought, would be the means of dissolving society into its original elements.

But that day could never arrive. A desperate disease required a strong remedy. Nothing short of those convulsions could tear up the towers or dismantle the bulwarks of that structure of ecclesiastical power which had been continually built up, and had been strengthened through successive generations. If we

wait till we can prevent evil from mingling with the good, we shall have to abandon many of those enterprises which have for their object the amelioration of society. The elements of strife in the bosom of the Church were labouring for a vent, and would accomplish it ere long. As well might the men of those days have saved Europe from that outburst, as they could have prevented that stream of lava from issuing from the summit of the mountain which changes the gardens of roses at its foot into a bleak and desolate waste.

If the Reformation had been postponed, according to the wishes of Erasmus, the consequence would have been that the people, unrestrained by that piety which it promoted, would have rushed forth with uncontrollable violence, and would have spread ruin around them. We owe a debt of gratitude to those who laboured to prevent that catastrophe, and who, instead of shrinking from the dangers and difficulties which they were sure to encounter, endeavoured to contend with and to destroy those evils which followed in the train of the Reformation, when she went forth on her errand of mercy to the nations of the earth.

The cry for deliverance which had resounded through the ages, had, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, deepened into an impassioned wail of agony. In Germany, the nobles and the commonalty united in seeking for deliverance from the yoke of bondage. The nation of Germany was, in fact, heaving and

swelling like the waves of the stormy ocean. Signs were to be seen on all hands that the time for the regeneration of Christendom could not be far distant. Even princes of the Church of Rome, the Bishop of Augsburg, the Bishop of Meissen, and the Bishop of Breslau, were found preparing the way for the Reformation, by teaching with stammering lips in their dioceses those great truths which Luther was soon with such power to proclaim. The same God who prepared the hearts of the mighty ones of the earth, its monarchs, its statesmen, and its warriors, prepared also many dwelling far from the world's highway, to aid those who were valiant for the truth upon the earth in smiting down the oppressors of God's Church. When the first trumpet-blast sounded through the land, many young men, who afterwards filled the highest places in the Church, were seen starting forth from their retirement, armed with the sword of the Spirit, fully prepared for the glorious strife, and coming to 'the help of the Lord against the mighty.' Many, too, remaining in their humble occupations, aided in this enterprise. Hans Sachs, the shoemaker of Nuremberg, was constantly pouring forth spiritual songs from his magic lyre, which nerved the arm of many of his fellow-countrymen, and contributed greatly to the signal victory which they at length gained over the legions of their foes. Thus, then, there were everywhere signs that the hour of the long-prayed for deliverance was rapidly approaching.

As we are now standing on the threshold of those events which ushered in the Reformation, it becomes important to trace God's purpose through the ages that Germany should be the principal theatre of the struggle with the great papal army. The constitution of the empire was favourable to the progress of the Reformation. Germany consisted of a confederation of States. Though the sovereign of one State might be opposed, the sovereign of another might be friendly, to the propagation of the Reformed doctrine through the territory subject to his rule. The kingdom of truth thus established in one district might gradually extend its boundaries, till at length it became co-extensive with the whole of the vast territory which was subject to the emperor.

Besides, the papal yoke had pressed more heavily upon Germany than upon any other part of the great European commonwealth. The popes had launched their spiritual thunderbolts against emperors and magistrates because they refused to obey their arbitrary mandates. The Reformation in Germany became a popular cause on account of the appeal which it made to the sentiments of the large body of the people. This opposition to Rome was a heritage from the days of Henry IV. and the Hohenstaufens. Pope Hildebrand had compelled Henry of Germany to wait bare-foot and bareheaded in the deep snow for three days and three nights in front of the fortress of Canossa, before he would remove from him the ban of excom-

munication. The contest thus begun between the popes and the emperors, which terminated with the victory of the former, had nourished a strong feeling of opposition to the conqueror, which was deepened by the crimes and excesses of the papal court. Those ecclesiastical tyrants deprived the States of the most solemn rites of religion, forbade the requiem to resound 'through the long-drawn aisle' over the body of the departed one, and compelled men to enter on the closest of all earthly relationships without the benediction of the Church, because they had refused to obey some arbitrary political edict which they had issued from their council-chamber.

During this period of civil discord which they industriously fomented, they deprived the secular princes of the most valuable of their privileges. In May, 1510, the States, assembled at Augsburg transmitted to the emperor a list of ten capital grievances, which they alleged against the pope and clergy. The populace, also, were equally indignant on account of the exactions of their ecclesiastical sovereigns. By means of annates, reservations, and commendams, the countless devices of the Roman chancery, they had drawn away more of its wealth from Germany than from any other country, which served to enrich ecclesiastics dwelling in ignoble ease in their marble palaces on the banks of the Tiber. It might, therefore, be supposed that Germany would be most anxious to cast off the yoke of her Romish oppressor.

While Germany was at this time the centre of that revolt which was soon to rob the pope of one province after another of his spiritual empire, we must not forget that the movement had been only partially suppressed, and that it really began in England nearly a century and a half before, when Wiclif condemned transubstantiation in the schools at Oxford. The work thus begun by Wiclif was carried on in England during the fifteenth and the early part of the sixteenth century. We can trace only indistinctly the education of the people of England in the great evangelical truths, 'because, from fear of persecution, it was conducted in the secret chamber, or in the lonely valley among the hills, or around the pale watch-fire in the bosom of some large forest.' Wiclif's influence is made manifest by the continued circulation of his Bible; by the persecutions in the first half of the fifteenth century, during which we see the funeral pyres blazing up amid the surrounding darkness; by Pecoock's *Repressor*, designed to defend the clergy from the charges brought against them by the Lollards, which preserves their best arguments against existing practices, and enables us to prove that the influence of his teaching had not ceased in the middle of the fifteenth century; by the continued reading of his books at Oxford; by a statement of Leland as to the circulation of his books, and the known circulation of his sermons in England; and by extracts given by Foxe, in his *Acts and Monuments*, found in episcopal

registers, as to persecutions for holding his opinions in the early part of the sixteenth century.

The progress of the Reformation in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries may, on account of the imperfect evidence thus obtained, be compared to the course of a river which a traveller, standing on an eminence, observes, soon after it has issued from its source, as it winds, like a silver thread, through the landscape. Afterwards it disappears from his view beneath the gloom of the overhanging woods and shrubs which fringe its banks, so that it appears once more to have descended into the bowels of the earth. Then again it emerges from its hiding-place, but soon, as before, vanishes from his sight. As his eye ranges over the landscape, he observes that it becomes broader as it rolls onward, and that it indicates its presence by crystal mirrors set at intervals in the openings of the woods which sparkle beneath the sun's meridian splendour. And now, no longer hidden, it flows majestically forwards, foaming over the rocks which interrupt its progress, until at length it expands into a bay, where, 'laughing at the storm, rich navies ride,' and pours a large tribute of waters into the mighty ocean.

We can also trace the influence of Wiclif on the Reformation in Germany. After a sanguinary war, in which they displayed great valour, the Hussites or Taborites founded, in 1457, a church called the church of the United Brethren. We know that,

unsubdued by persecution, they continued to be the unceasing opponents of the dogmas and corruptions of Romanism. We learn that they zealously opposed indulgences at the beginning of the sixteenth century.¹ In a confession of faith sent to King Wladislaus in 1504, advancing farther than John Huss, but agreeing with their other spiritual progenitor, John Wiclif, they declared themselves against the worship of the saints, and against purgatory, and that they held the real spiritual presence of Christ in the Eucharist.² We have distinct evidence that they exhibited a lively zeal in the propagation of their doctrine. They had their emissaries in all parts of Germany;³ and their efforts were crowned with great success. During the fifteenth century their adherents were to be found throughout the land, especially in Franconia.⁴ For instance, in 1446 a certain Frederick Müller preached the doctrines of the Hussites in Taubergrunde, and produced a great impression upon the people, and a certain Frederick Tunawer had preached their doctrines with great success about the middle of the fifteenth century, at Wurtemberg, Basle, and Strasburg.⁵ Their views had extended as far as

¹ Gieseler's *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. v. pp. 90 and 163.

² *Ibid.*, vol. v. p. 153. In both cases there is a reference to original documents.

³ Ullmann's *Reformers before the Reformation*, vol. i. p. 334, who gives a reference to Gieseler.

⁴ Ullmann, vol. i. p. 334.

⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. i. p. 337.

the Rhine and the Neckar, as we learn from a decree of Eugenius IV. against the council of Basle in 1431, in which he states that in and around Basle the people were infected with the Hussite heresy. Hussite missionaries were spread far and wide in Germany, who had given an impulse to the spiritual progress of a certain Nicholas of Bohemia, which he, in his turn, communicated to John of Wesel. When Luther came forward to do battle with the Church of Rome, he was welcomed by a numerous body of Hussites, who had prepared the way for him in the manner just described, and who now completed their emancipation by casting in their lot with him.

We know, indeed, that other men had prepared the way for Luther in Germany, who exercised a more direct influence upon him individually than the followers of Wiclif. He says of John of Wesel that he had studied his writings for his degree; of the Brothers of Common Life, that they had been the first to receive the Gospel; of Wessel that it might be said that he had derived from him all his knowledge; of Tauler, that neither in the Latin nor in the German tongue does there exist a more sound or more evangelical theology than his; of the author of the *Theologia Germanica*, that no one had instructed him better what God and Christ and all things are; and lastly, of Staupitz, that by his means the light of the Gospel had just dawned on his heart, and his words struck like the arrows of a strong man into his mind. We

must, however, remember that, though we cannot say that Luther was indebted directly to the Hussites for his religious views, we can yet affirm positively that these spiritual descendants of Wiclif had propagated their original opinions through the length and breadth of Germany.

Thus Wiclif and his followers had been the heralds of the Reformation long before the appearance of John of Goch, John of Wesel, and John Wessel; for they alone had lifted up their voices against all the dogmas of the Papacy.

Thus it is evident that Luther was altogether wrong when he affirmed that Wiclif had attacked, not the doctrine, but the life of the Church; and that he was himself largely indebted to him for that preparation which contributed so much to the success of his work. He unconsciously acknowledges his obligations to him, when he says that he had carefully studied the writings of John of Wesel; for the latter was, through the Hussites, one of Wiclif's spiritual children.

On the successful issue of Luther's work were suspended the spiritual destinies of many millions. We must, however, remember that Luther would have lifted up his voice in vain against the iniquities and errors of the Papacy, if preparation had not been made for emancipation from them through the ages, and if there had not been multitudes in many lands who were waiting for some one to lead them to the attack on the legions of their foes. While, therefore,

we cherish with gratitude the memory of those who burst the bands of spiritual despotism, let us never forget our obligations to those without whose previous work, carried on partly in silence and obscurity, partly on the world's high stage, no yearning for a truer and purer service to God would have existed in the minds of many, and no way of escape might have been found for those conscious of their slavery from the yoke of an intolerable bondage. Let us recognise in that work, and in all the preparations which have come before us, the agency of the great Head of the Church, who was guiding events towards the fulfilment of His purposes in that Reformation under Luther which has been and will be a source of blessing to many millions in every part of the habitable world.

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