

The History of Protestantism – Volume First – Book Fourth – Christendom at the Opening of the Sixteenth Century

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A Voice from the Philadelphian Church Age by Rev. James Aitken
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Table of Contents

[Chapter 1](#) . . . PROTESTANTISM AND MEDIEVALISM

Ancient Society Discarded – New Races brought on Stage – Their
Capacity for Progress – The Reformation not Possible before
the Sixteenth Century – Medievalism Revives – A Conflict –
Odds – The Victory of the Weak.

[Chapter 2](#) . . . THE EMPIRE

Fall of Ancient Empire – Revived by the Pope – Charlemagne –
The Golden Bull – The Seven Electors – Rules and Forms of
Election – Ceremony of Coronation – Insignia – Coronation
Feast – Emperor's Power Limited – Charles V. – Capitulation –
Spain – Becomes One Monarchy on the Approach of the
Reformation – Its Power Increased by the Discoveries of
Columbus – Brilliant Assemblage of States under Charles V. –

Liberty in Danger – Protestantism comes to Save it

[Chapter 3](#) . . . THE PAPACY, OR CHRISTENDOM UNDER THE TIARA

Complex Constitution of the Papacy – Temporal Sovereignty limited to Papal States – Pontifical Supremacy covers all Christendom – Governmental Machinery – Legate-a-latare – Interdict – The Concordat – Concordat with Austria – The Papacy in Piedmont – Indulgences – The Confessional – The Papacy Absolute in Temporals as in Spirituals – Enormous Strength

BOOK FOURTH

CHRISTENDOM AT THE OPENING OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

CHAPTER 1 [Back to Top](#)

PROTESTANTISM AND MEDIEVALISM

Ancient Society Discarded – New Races brought on Stage – Their Capacity for Progress – The Reformation not Possible before the Sixteenth Century – Medievalism Revives – A Conflict – Odds – The Victory of the Weak.

WE are now arrived at the sixteenth century. For a thousand years the Great Ruler had been laying, in the midst of wars and great ethnical revolutions, the foundations of a new and more glorious edifice than any that former ages had seen. Ancient society was too enfeebled by slavery, and too corrupted by polytheism, to be able to bear the weight of the structure about to be erected. The experiment had been tried of rearing the new social edifice upon the old foundations, but the attempt had turned out a failure. By the fourth century, the Gospel, so warmly embraced at first by the Greek and Roman nations, had begun to decline – had, in fact, become greatly corrupted. It was seen that these ancient races were unable to advance to the full manhood of Christianity and civilization. They were continually turning back to old models

and established precedents. They lacked the capacity of adapting themselves to new forms of life, and surrendering themselves to the guidance of great principles. What was to be done? Must the building which God purposed to erect be abandoned, because a foundation sufficiently strong and sound could not be found for it? Should Christianity remain the half-finished structure, or rather the defaced ruin, which the fourth and fifth centuries beheld it?

An answer was given to this question when the gates of the North were opened, and new and hardy races, issuing from the obscure regions of Germany, spread themselves over Southern and Western Europe. An invisible Power marched before these tribes, and placed each – the Huns, the Vandals, the Burgundians, the Franks, the Lombards – in that quarter of Christendom which best suited the part each was destined to play in that great drama of which the stamping out of the laws, the religion, and the government of the old world was the first act. The same Power which guided their march from the remote lands of their birth, and chose for them their several habitations, continued to watch over the development of their manners, the formation of their language, and the growth of their literature and their art, of their laws and their government; and thus, in the slow course of the centuries, were laid firm and broad the foundations of a new order of things. These tribes had no past to look back upon. They had no storied traditions and observances which they trembled to break through. There was no spell upon them like that which operated so mischievously upon the Greek and Latin races. They were free to enter the new path. Daring, adventurous, and liberty-loving, we can trace their steady advance, step by step, through the convulsions of the tenth century, the intellectual awakening of the twelfth, and the literary revival of the fifteenth, onward to the great spiritual movement of the sixteenth.

It is at this great moral epoch that we are now arrived. It

will aid us if we pause in our narrative, and glance for a moment at the constitution of Europe, and note specially the spirit of its policy, the play of its ambitions, and the crisis to which matters were fast tending at the opening of the sixteenth century. This will enable us to understand what we may term the timing of the Reformation. We have just seen that this great movement was not possible before the century we speak of, for till then there was no stable basis for it in the condition of the Teutonic nations. The rapid survey that is to follow will show us further that this renewal of society could not, without the most disastrous consequences to the world, have been longer delayed. Had the advent of Protestantism been postponed for a century or two beyond its actual date, not only would all the preparations of the previous ages have miscarried, but the world would have been overtaken, and society, it may be, dissolved a second time, by a tremendous evil, which had been growing for some time, and had now come to a head. Without the Protestantism of the sixteenth century, not only would the intellectual awakening of the twelfth and the literary revival of the fifteenth century have been in vain, but the mental torpor, and it may be the religion also, of the Turk, would at this day have been reigning in Europe. Christendom, at the epoch of which we speak, had only two things in its choice – to accept the Gospel, and fight its way through scaffolds and stakes to the liberty which the Gospel brings with it, or to crouch down beneath the shadow of a universal Spanish monarchy, to be succeeded in no long time by the yet gloomier night of Moslem despotism.

It would require more space than is here at our disposal to pass in review the several kingdoms of Europe, and note the transformation which all of them underwent as the era of Protestantism approached. Nor is this necessary. The characteristic of the Christendom of that age lay in two things – first in the constitution and power of the Empire, and secondly in the organization and supremacy of the Papacy.

For certain ends, and within certain limits, each separate State of Europe was independent; it could pursue its own way, make war with whom it had a mind, or conclude a peace when it chose; but beyond these limits each State was simply the member of a corporate body, which was under the sway of a double directorate. First came the Empire, which in the days of Charlemagne, and again in the days of Charles V., assumed the presidency of well-nigh the whole of Europe. Above the Empire was the Papacy. Wielding a subtler influence and armed with higher sanctions, it was the master of the Empire in even a greater degree than the Empire was the master of Europe.

It is instructive to mark that, at the moment when the Protestant principle was about to appear, Medievalism stood up in a power and grandeur unknown to it for ages. The former was at its weakest, the latter had attained its full strength when the battle between them was joined. To see how great the odds, what an array of force Medievalism had at its service, and to be able to guess what would have been the future of Christendom and the world, had not Protestantism come at this crisis to withstand, nay, to vanquish the frightful combination of power that menaced the liberties of mankind, and to feel how marvelous in every point of view was the victory which, on the side of the weaker power, crowned this great contest, we must turn first to the Empire.

CHAPTER 2 [Back to Top](#)

THE EMPIRE

Fall of Ancient Empire – Revived by the Pope – Charlemagne – The Golden Bull – The Seven Electors – Rules and Forms of Election – Ceremony of Coronation – Insignia – Coronation Feast – Emperor's Power Limited – Charles V. – Capitulation – Spain – Becomes One Monarchy on the Approach of the Reformation – Its Power Increased by the Discoveries of Columbus – Brilliant Assemblage of States under Charles V. – Liberty in Danger – Protestantism comes to Save it

THE one great Empire of ancient Rome was, in the days of Valentinian (A.D. 364), divided into two, the Eastern and the Western. The Turk eventually made himself heir to the Eastern Empire, taking forcible possession of it by his great guns, and savage but warlike hordes. The Western Empire has dragged out a shadowy existence to our own day. There was, it is true, a parenthesis in its life; it succumbed to the Gothic invasion, and for awhile remained in abeyance; but the Pope raised up the fallen fabric. The genius and martial spirit of the Caesars, which had created this Empire at the first, the Pope could not revive, but the name and forms of the defunct government he could and did resuscitate. He grouped the kingdoms of Western Europe into a body or federation, and selecting one of their kings he set him over the confederated States, with the title of Emperor. This Empire was a fictitious or nominal one; it was the image or likeness of the past reflecting itself on the face of modern Europe.

The Empire dazzled the age which witnessed its sudden erection. The constructive genius and the marvelous legislative and administrative powers of Charlemagne, its first head, succeeded in giving it a show of power; but it was impossible by a mere fiat to plant those elements of cohesion, and those sentiments of homage to law and order, which alone could guarantee its efficiency and permanency. It supposed an advance of society, and a knowledge on the part of mankind of their rights and duties, which was far from being the fact. "The Empire of the Germans," says the historian Muller, "was constituted in a most extraordinary manner: it was a federal republic; but its members were so diverse with regard to form, character, and power, that it was extremely difficult to introduce universal laws, or to unite the whole nation in measures of mutual interest." [1] "The Golden Bull," says Villers, "that strange monument of the fourteenth century, fixed, it is true, a few relations of the head with the members; but nothing could be more indistinct than the public law of all those States, independent though at the same time

united... Had not the Turks, at that time the violent enemies of all Christendom, come during the first years of the reign of Frederick to plant the crescent in Europe, and menaced incessantly the Empire with invasion, it is not easy to see how the feeble tie which bound that body together could have remained unbroken. The terror inspired by Mahomet II. and his ferocious soldiers, was the first common interest which led the princes of Germany to unite themselves to one another, and around the imperial throne.”[2]

The author last quoted makes mention of the Golden Bull. Let us bestow a glance on this ancient and curious document; it will bring before us the image of the time. Its author was Charles IV., Emperor and King of Bohemia. Pope Gregory, about the year 997, it is believed, instituted seven electors. Of these, three were Churchmen and three lay princes, and one of kingly rank was added, to make up the mystic number of seven, as some have thought, but more probably to prevent equality of votes. The three Churchmen were the Archbishop of Treves, Chancellor for France; the Archbishop of Mainz, Chancellor for Germany; the Archbishop of Cologne, Chancellor for Italy. The four laymen were the King of Bohemia, the Duke of Saxony, the Count Palatine of the Rhine, and the Marquis of Brandenburg.

The Archbishop of Mainz, by letters patent, was to fix the day of election, which was to take place not later than three months from the death of the former emperor. Should the archbishop fail to summon the electors, they were to meet notwithstanding within the appointed time, and elect one to the imperial dignity. The electors were to afford to each other free passage and a safe-conduct through their territories when on their way to the discharge of their electoral duties. If an elector could not come in person he might send a deputy. The election was to take place in Frankfort-on-the-Maine. No elector was to be permitted to enter the city attended by more than two hundred horsemen, whereof fifty only were to be armed. The citizens of Frankfort

were made responsible for the safety of the electors, under the penalty of loss of goods and privileges. The morning after their arrival, the electors, attired in their official habits, proceeded on horseback from the council-hall to the cathedral church of St. Bartholomew, where mass was sung. Then the Archbishop of Mainz administered an oath at the altar to each elector, that he would, without bribe or reward, choose a temporal head for Christendom. Thereafter they met in secret conclave. Their decision must be come to within thirty days, but if deferred beyond that period, they were to be fed on bread and water, and prevented leaving the city till they had completed the election. A majority of votes constituted a valid election, and the decision was to be announced from a stage erected for the purpose in front of the choir of the cathedral.

The person chosen to the imperial dignity took an oath to maintain the profession of the Catholic faith, to protect the Church in all her rights, to be obedient to the Pope, to administer justice, and to conserve all the customs and privileges of the electors and States of the Empire. The imperial insignia were then given him, consisting of a golden crown, a scepter, a globe called the imperial apple, the sword of Charlemagne, a copy of the Gospels said to have been found in his grave, and a rich mantle which was presented to one of the emperors by an Arabian prince.[3] The ceremonies enjoined by the Golden Bull to be observed at the coronation feast are curious; the following minute and graphic account of them is given by an old traveler: – “In solemn court the emperor shall sit on his throne, and the Duke of Saxony, laying a heap of oats as high as his horse’s saddle before the court-gate, shall, with a silver measure of twelve marks’ price, deliver oats to the chief equerry of the stable, and then, sticking his staff in the oats, shall depart, and the vice-marshal shall distribute the rest of the oats. The three archbishops shall say grace at the emperor’s table, and he of them who is chancellor of the place shall lay reverently the seals before

the emperor, which the emperor shall restore to him; and the staff of the chancellor shall be worth twelve marks silver. The Marquis of Brandenburg, sitting upon his horse, with a silver basin of twelve marks' weight, and a towel, shall alight from his horse and give water to the emperor. The Count Palatine, sitting upon his horse, with four dishes of silver with meat, each dish worth three marks, shall alight and set the dishes on the table. The King of Bohemia, sitting upon his horse, with a silver cup worth twelve marks, filled with water and wine, shall alight and give it the emperor to drink. The gentleman of Falkenstein, under-chamberlain, the gentleman of Nortemberg, master of the kitchen, and the gentleman of Limburch, vice-butler, or in their absence the ordinary officers of the court, shall have the said horses, basin, dishes, cup, staff, and measure, and shall after wait at the emperor's table. The emperor's table shall be six feet higher than any other table, where he shall sit alone, and the table of the empress shall be by his side three feet lower. The electors' tables shall be three feet lower than that of the empress, and all of equal height, and three of them shall be on the emperor's right hand, three on his left hand, and one before his face, and each shall sit alone at his table. When one elector has done his office he shall go and stand at his own table, and so in order the rest, till all have performed their offices, and then all seven shall sit down at one time."

"The emperor shall be chosen at Frankfort, crowned at Augsburg, and shall hold his first court at Nuremberg, except there be some lawful impediment. The electors are presumed to be Germans, and their sons at the age of seven years shall be taught the grammar, and the Italian and Slavonian tongues, so as at fourteen years of age they may be skillful therein and be worthy assessors to the emperor."[4]

The electors are, by birth, the privy councilors of the emperor; they ought, in the phraseology of Charles IV., "to enlighten the Holy Empire, as seven shining lights, in the

unity of the sevenfold spirit;" and, according to the same monarch, are "the most honorable members of the imperial body." [5] The rights which the emperor could exercise on his own authority, those he could exert with the consent of the electors, and those which belonged to him only with the concurrence of all the princes and States of the Empire have been variously described. Generally, it may be said that the emperor could not enact new laws, nor impose taxes, nor levy bodies of men, nor make wars, nor erect fortifications, nor form treaties of peace and alliances, except with the concurrent voice of the electors, princes, and States. He had no special revenue to support the imperial dignity, and no power to enforce the imperial commands. The princes were careful not to make the emperor too powerful, lest he should abridge the independent sovereignty which each exercised within his own dominions, and the free cities were equally jealous lest the imperial power should encroach upon their charters and privileges. The authority of the emperor was almost entirely nominal. We speak of the times preceding the peace of Westphalia; by that settlement the constitution of the Empire was more accurately defined.

Its first days were its most vigorous. It began to decline when no longer upheld by the power and guided by the genius of Charlemagne. The once brilliant line of Pepin had now ceased to produce warriors and legislators. By a sudden break-down it had degenerated into a race of simpletons and imbeciles. By-and-by the Empire passed from the Frank kings to the Saxon monarchs. Under the latter it recovered a little strength; but soon Gregory VII. came with his grand project of making the tiara supreme not only over all crowns, but above the imperial diadem itself. Gregory succeeded in the end of the day, for the issue of the long and bloody war which he commenced was that the Empire had to bow to the miter, and the emperor to take an oath of vassalage to the Pontiff. The Empire had only two elements of cohesion – Roman Catholicism within, and the terror of the Turk without. Its constituent princes were

rivals rather than members of one confederacy. Animosities and dissensions were continually springing up amongst them. They invaded each other's territories, regardless of the displeasure of the emperor. By these wars trade was impeded, knowledge repressed, and outrage and rapine flourished to a degree that threatened society itself with destruction. The authors of these calamities at last felt the necessity of devising some other way of adjusting their quarrels than by the sword. The Imperial Council, the Aulic Diet, the Diet of the Empire, were the successive methods had recourse to for obviating these frequent and cruel resorts to force, which were giving to the provinces of the Empire the appearance of a devastated and uninhabited region. In A.D. 1519, by the death of Maximilian, the imperial crown became vacant. Two illustrious and powerful princes came forward to contest the brilliant prize – Francis I. of France, and Charles of Austria, the grandson of Maximilian, and King of Spain. Henry VIII. of England, the third great monarch of the age, also entered the lists, but finding at an early stage of the contest that his chance of success was small, he withdrew. Francis I. was a gallant prince, a chivalrous soldier, a friend of the new learning, and so frank and affable in his manners that he won the affection of all who approached him. But the Germans were averse to accept as the head of their Empire the king of a nation whose genius, language, and manners were so widely different from their own. Their choice fell on Charles, who, though he lacked the brilliant personal qualities of his rival, drew his lineage from their own race, had his cradle in one of their own towns, Ghent, and was the heir of twenty-eight kingdoms.

There was danger as well as safety in the vast power of the man whom the Germans had elected to wear a crown which had in it so much grandeur and so little solid authority. The conqueror of the East, Selim II., was perpetually hovering upon their frontier. They needed a strong arm to repel the invader, and thought they had found it in that of the master

of so many kingdoms; but the hand that shielded them from Moslem tyranny might, who could tell, crush their own liberties. It behooved them to take precautions against this possible catastrophe. They framed a Capitulation or claim of rights, enumerating and guaranteeing the privileges and immunities of the Germanic Body; and the ambassadors of Charles signed it in the name of their master, and he himself confirmed it by oath at his coronation. In this instrument the princes of Germany unconsciously provided for the defense of higher rights than their own royalties and immunities. They had erected an asylum to which Protestantism might retreat, when the day should come that the emperor would raise his mailed hand to crush it.

Charles V. was more powerful than any emperor had been for many an age preceding. To the imperial dignity, a shadow in the case of many of his predecessors, was added in his the substantial power of Spain. A singular concurrence of events had made Spain a mightier kingdom by far than any that had existed in Europe since the days of the Caesars. Of this magnificent monarchy the whole resources were in the hands of the man who was at once the wearer of the imperial dignity and the enemy of the Reformation. This makes it imperative that we should bestow a glance on the extent and greatness of the Spanish kingdom, when estimating the overwhelming force now arrayed against Protestantism.

As the Reformation drew nigh, Spain suddenly changed its form, and from being a congeries of diminutive kingdoms, it became one powerful empire. The various principalities, which up till this time dotted the surface of the Peninsula, were now merged into the two kingdoms of Arragon and Castile. There remained but one other step to make Spain one monarchy, and that step was taken in A.D. 1469, by the marriage of Ferdinand of Arragon and Isabella of Castile. In a few years thereafter these two royal personages ascended the thrones of Arragon and Castile, and thus all the crowns of Spain were united on their

head. One monarch now swayed his scepter over the Iberian Peninsula, from San Sebastian to the Rock of Gibraltar, from the Pyrenees to the straits that wash the feet of the mountains of Mauritania. The whole resources of the country now found their way into one exchequer; all its tribes were gathered round one standard; and its whole power was wielded by one hand.

Spain, already great, was about to become still greater. Columbus was just fitting out the little craft in which he was to explore the Atlantic, and add, by his skill and adventurous courage, to the crown of Spain the most brilliant appendage which subject ever gave to monarch. Since the days of old Rome there had arisen no such stupendous political structure as that which was about to show itself to the world in the Spanish Monarchy. Spain itself was but a unit in the assemblage of kingdoms that made up this vast empire. The European dependencies of Spain were numerous. The fertile plains and vine-clad hills of Sicily and Naples were hers. The vast garden of Lombardy, which the Po waters and the Alps enclose, with its queenly cities, its plantations of olive and mulberry, its corn and oil and silk, were hers. The Low Countries were hers, with their canals, their fertile meadows stocked with herds, their cathedrals and museums, and their stately towns, the seats of learning and the hives of industry. As if Europe were too narrow to contain so colossal a power, Spain stretched her scepter across the great western sea, and ample provinces in the New World called her mistress. Mexico and Peru were hers, and the products of their virgin soils and the wealth of their golden mines were borne across the deep to replenish her bazaars and silver shops. It was not the Occident only that poured its treasures at her feet; Spain laid her hand on the Orient, and the fragrant spices and precious gems of India ministered to her pleasure. The sun never set on the dominions of Spain. The numerous countries that owned her sway sent each whatever was most precious and most prized among its products, to stock her markets and

enrich her exchequer. To Spain flowed the gums of Arabia, the drugs of Molucca, the diamonds of Borneo, the wheat of Lombardy, the wine of Naples, the rich fabrics worked on the looms of Bruges and Ghent, the arms and cutlery forged in the factories and wrought up in the workshops of Liege and Namur.

This great empire was served by numerous armies and powerful fleets. Her soldiers, drawn from every nation, and excellently disciplined, were brave, hardy, familiar with danger, and inured to every climate from the tropics to the arctic regions. They were led by commanders of consummate ability, and the flag under which they marched had conquered on a hundred battle-fields. When the master of all these provinces, armies and fleets, added the imperial diadem, as Charles V. did, to all his other dignities, his glory was perfected. We may adapt to the Spanish monarch the bold image under which the prophet presented the greatness of the Assyrian power. "The Spaniard "was a cedar in" Europe "with fair branches, and with a shadowing shroud, and of an high stature; and his top was among the thick boughs. The waters made him great, the deep set him up on high with her rivers running round about his plants, and sent out her little rivers unto all the trees of the field. Therefore his height was exalted above all the trees of the field, and his boughs were multiplied, and his branches became long because of the multitude of waters, when he shot forth." (Ezekiel 31:3-5)[[6](#)]

The monarch of Spain, though master of so much, was laying schemes for extending the limits of his already overgrown dominions, and making himself absolute and universal lord. Since the noon of the Roman power, the liberties of the world had at no time been in so great peril as now. The shadow of a universal despotism was persistently projecting itself farther and yet farther upon the kingdoms and peoples of Western Europe. There was no principle known to the men of that age that seemed capable of doing battle with this colossus, and staying its advance. This despotism, into whose hands as it

seemed the nations of Christendom had been delivered, claimed a Divine right, and, as such, was upheld by the spiritual forces of priestcraft, and the material aids of fleets and legions. Liberty was retreating before it. Literature and art had become its allies, and were weaving chains for the men whom they had promised to emancipate. As Liberty looked around, she could see no arm on which to lean, no champion to do battle for her. Unless Protestantism had arrived at that crisis, a universal despotism would have covered Europe, and Liberty banished from the earth must have returned to her native skies. "Dr. Martin Luther, a monk from the county of Mansfeld... by his heroism alone, imparted to the half of Europe a new soul; created an opposition which became the safeguard of freedom." [7]

CHAPTER 3 [Back to Top](#)

THE PAPACY, OR CHRISTENDOM UNDER THE TIARA

Complex Constitution of the Papacy – Temporal Sovereignty limited to Papal States – Pontifical Supremacy covers all Christendom – Governmental Machinery – Legate-a-latere – Interdict – The Concordat – Concordat with Austria – The Papacy in Piedmont – Indulgences – The Confessional – The Papacy Absolute in Temporals as in Spirituals – Enormous Strength

WE now ascend to the summit of the European edifice as constituted at the beginning of the sixteenth century. There was a higher monarch in the world than the emperor, and a more powerful kingdom in Christendom than the Empire. That monarch was the Pope – that Empire, the Papacy.

Any view of Christendom that fails to take note of the relations of the Papacy to its several kingdoms, overlooks the prominent characteristic of Europe as it existed when the great struggle for religion and liberty was begun. The relation of the Papacy to the other kingdoms of Christendom was, in a word, that of dominancy. It was their chief, their

ruler. It taught them to see in the Seven Hills, and the power seated thereon, the bond of their union, the fountain of their legislation, and the throne of their government. It thus knit all the kingdoms of Europe into one great confederacy or monarchy. They lived and breathed in the Papacy. Their fleets and armies, their constitutions and laws, existed more for it than for themselves. They were employed to advance the policy and uphold the power of the sovereigns who sat in the Papal chair.

In the one Pontifical government there were rolled up in reality two governments, one within the other. The smaller of these covered the area of the Papal States; while the larger, spurning these narrow limits, embraced the whole of Christendom, making of its thrones and nations but one monarchy, one theocratic kingdom, over which was stretched the scepter of an absolute jurisdiction.

In order to see how this came to pass, we must briefly enumerate the various expedients by which the Papacy contrived to exercise jurisdiction outside its own special territory, and by which it became the temporal not less than the spiritual head of Christendom – the real ruler of the kingdoms of medieval Europe. How a monarchy, professedly spiritual, should exercise temporal dominion, and especially how it should make its temporal dominion co-extensive with Christendom, is not apparent at first sight. Nevertheless, history attests the fact that it did so make it. One main expedient by which the Papacy wielded temporal power and compassed political ends in other kingdoms was the office of “legate-a-latere.” The term signifies an ambassador from the Pope’s side. The legate-a-latere was, in fact, the alter ego of the Pope, whose person he represented, and with whose power he was clothed. He was sent into all countries, not to mediate but to govern; his functions being analogous to those of the deputies or rulers whom the pagan masters of the world were wont to send from Rome to govern the subject provinces of the

Empire.

In the prosecution of his mission the legate-a-latere made it his first business in the particular country into which he entered to set up his court, and to try causes and pronounce judgment in the Pope's name. Neither the authority of the sovereign nor the law of the land was acknowledged in the court of the legate; all causes were determined by the canon law of Rome. A vast multitude of cases, and these by no means spiritual, did the legate contrive to bring under his jurisdiction. He claimed to decide all questions of divorce. These decisions involved, of course, civil issues, such as the succession to landed estates, the ownership of other forms of wealth, and in some instances the right to the throne. All questions touching the lands and estates of the convents, monasteries, and abbeys were determined by the legate. This gave him the direct control of one-half the landed property of most of the kingdoms of Europe. He could impose taxes, and did levy a penny upon every house in France and England. He had power, moreover, to impose extraordinary levies for special objects of the Church upon both clergy and laity. He made himself the arbiter of peace and war.[1] He meddled in all the affairs of princes, conducted perpetual intrigues, fomented endless quarrels, and sustained himself umpire in all controversies. If any one felt himself aggrieved by the judgment of the legate, he could have no redress from the courts of the country, nor even from the sovereign. He must go in person to Rome. Thus did the Pope, through his legate-a-latere, manage to make himself the grand justiciary of the kingdom.[2]

The vast jurisdiction of the legate-a-latere was supported and enforced by the "interdict." The interdict was to the legate instead of an army. The blow it dealt was more rapid, and the subjugation it effected on those on whom it fell was more complete, than any that could have been achieved by any number of armed men. When a monarch proved obdurate, the legate

unsheathed this sword against him. The clergy throughout the length and breadth of his kingdom instantly desisted from the celebration of the ordinances of religion. All the subjects were made partners with the sovereign in this ghostly but dreadful infliction. In an age when there was no salvation but through the priesthood, and no grace but through the channel of the Sacraments, the terrors of interdict were irresistible. All the signs of malediction everywhere visible throughout the land on which this terrible chastisement had been laid, struck the imagination with all the greater force that they were viewed as the symbols of a doom which did not terminate on earth, but which extended into the other world. The interdict in those ages never failed to gain its end, for the people, punished for the fault, real or supposed, of their sovereign, broke out into murmurs, sometimes into rebellion, and the unhappy prince found in the long run that he must either face insurrection or make his peace with the Church. It was thus the shadow of power only which was left the king; the substance of sovereignty filched from him was carried to Rome and vested in the chair of the Pope.[3]

Another contrivance by which the Papacy, while it left to princes the name of king, took from them the actual government of their kingdoms, was the Concordat. These agreements or treaties between the Pope and the kings of Christendom varied in their minor details, but the leading provisions were alike in all of them, their key-note being the supremacy of Rome, and the subordination of the State with which that haughty power had deigned to enter into compact. The Concordat bound the government with which it was made to enact no law, profess no religion, open no school, and permit no branch of knowledge to be taught within its dominions, until the Pope had first given his consent. Moreover, it bound it to keep open the gates of the realm for the admission of such legates, bishops, and nuncios as the Pope might be pleased to send thither for the purpose of administering his spiritual authority, and to receive such bulls and briefs as he might be pleased to

promulgate, which were to have the force of law in the counter whose rights and privileges these missives very possibly invaded, or altogether set aside. The advantages secured by the contracting parties on the other side were usually of the most meager kind, and were respected only so long as it was not for the interests of the Church of Rome to violate them. In short, the Concordat gave the Pope the first place in the government of the kingdom, leaving to the sovereign and the Estates of the Realm only the second. It bound down the prince in vassalage, and the people in serfdom political and religious.[4]

Another formidable instrumentality for compassing the same ends was the hierarchy. The struggle commenced by Hildebrand, regarding investitures, ended in giving to the Pope the power of appointing bishops throughout all the Empire. This placed in the hands of the Pontiff the better half of the secular government of its kingdoms. The hierarchy formed a body powerful by their union, their intelligence, and the reverence which waited on their sacred office. Each member of that body had taken a feudal oath of obedience to the Pope.[5] The bishop was no mere priest, he was a ruler as well, being possessed of jurisdiction – that is, the power of law – the law he administered being the canon law of Rome. The “chapter” was but another term for the court by which the bishop exercised that jurisdiction, and as it was a recognized doctrine that the jurisdiction of the bishop was temporal as well as spiritual, the hierarchy formed in fact a magistracy, and a magistracy planted in the country by a foreign power, under an oath of obedience to the power that had appointed it – a magistracy independent of the sovereign, and wielding a combined temporal and spiritual jurisdiction over every person in the realm, and governing him alike in his religious acts, in his political duties, and in his temporal possessions.

Let us take the little kingdom of Sardinia as an illustration. On the 8th of January, 1855, a bill was introduced into the

Parliament of Turin for the suppression of convents and the more equal distribution of Church lands. The habitable portion of Sardinia is mostly comprised in the rich valley of the Po, and its population amounts only to about four and a half millions. Yet it appeared from the bill that in this small territory there were seven archbishops, thirty-four bishops, forty-one chapters, with eight hundred and sixty canons attached to the bishoprics; seventy-three simple chapters, with four hundred and seventy canons; eleven hundred livings for the canons; and lastly, four thousand two hundred and forty-seven parishes, with some thousands of parish priests. The domains of the Church represented a capital of four hundred millions of francs, yielding a yearly revenue of seventeen millions and upwards. Nor was even this the whole of the ecclesiastical burden borne by the little State. To the secular clergy we have to add eight thousand five hundred and sixty-three persons who wore cowls and veils. These were distributed into six hundred and four religious houses, whose annual cost was two millions and a half of francs.

There were thus from twelve to twenty thousand persons in Piedmont, all under oath, or under vows equivalent to an oath, to obey only the orders that came from Rome. These held one-fourth of the lands of the kingdom; they were exempt from the jurisdiction of the laws. They claimed the right of dictating to all the subjects of the realm how to act in every matter in which duty was involved – that is, in every matter absolutely – and they had the power of compelling obedience by penalties of a peculiarly forcible kind. It is obvious at a glance that the actual government of the kingdom was in the hands of these men – that is, of their master at Rome.

Let us glance briefly at the other principalities of the peninsula – the Levitical State, as Italy was wont to be called. We leave out of view the secular clergy with their gorgeous cathedrals, so rich in silver and gold, as well as in statuary and paintings; nor do we include their ample Church

lands, and their numerous dues drawn from the people. We confine ourselves to the ranks of the cloister. In 1863 a "Project of Law" was tabled in the Italian Chamber of Deputies for their suppression.[6] From this "Project" it appeared that there were in Italy eighty-four orders of monks, distributed in two thousand three hundred and eighty-two religious houses. Each of these eighty-four orders had numerous affiliated branches radiating over the country. All held property, save the four Mendicant orders. The value of the conventual property was estimated at forty million lire, and the number of persons made a grand total of sixty-three thousand two hundred and thirty-nine. This does not include the conventual establishments of the Papal States, nor the religious houses of Piedmont, which had been suppressed previous to 1863. If we take these into account, we cannot estimate the monastic corps of Italy at less than a hundred thousand.[7]

Besides those we have enumerated there were a host of instrumentalities all directed to the same end, the enforcement even of the government of Rome, mainly in things temporal, in the dominions of other sovereigns. Chief among these was the Confessional. The Confessional was called "the place of penitence;" it was, in reality, a seat of jurisdiction. It was a tribunal the highest of all tribunals, because to the Papist the tribunal of God. Its terrors as far transcended those of the human judgment-seat, as the sword of eternal anathema transcends the gallows of temporal governments. It afforded, moreover, unrivaled facilities for sowing sedition and organizing rebellion. Here the priest sat unseen, digging, hour by hour and day after day, the mine beneath the prince he had marked out for ruin, while the latter never once suspected that his overthrow was being prepared till he was hurled from his seat. There was, moreover, the device of dispensations and indulgences. Never did merchant by the most daring venture, nor statesman by the most ingenious scheme of finance, succeed in amassing such store of wealth as Rome did simply by selling pardon. She sent

the vendors of her wares into all countries, and as all felt that they needed forgiveness, all flocked to her market; and thus, "as one gathereth eggs," to employ the language of the prophet, so did Rome gather the riches of all the earth. She took care, moreover, that these riches should not "take to themselves wings and flee away." She invented mortmain. Not a penny of her accumulated hoards, not an acre of her wide domains, did her "dead hand" ever let go. Her property was beyond the reach of the law; this crowned the evil. The estates of the nobles could be dealt with by the civil tribunals, if so overgrown as to be dangerous to the public good. But it was the fate of the ecclesiastical property ever to grow – and with it, of course, the pride and arrogance of its owners – and however noxious the uses to which it was turned, however much it tended to impoverish the resources of the State, and undermine the industry of the nation, no remedy could be applied to the mischief. Century after century the evil continued and waxed stronger, till at length the Reformation came and dissolved the spell by which Rome had succeeded in making her enormous possessions inviolable to the arm of the law; covering them, as she did, with the sanctions of Heaven.

Thus did Rome by these expedients, and others which it were tedious here to enumerate, extend her government over all the countries of Christendom, alike in temporals as in spirituals. "The Pope's jurisdiction," said a Franciscan, "is universal, embracing the whole world, its temporalities as well as its spiritualities." [8] Rome did not set up the chair of Peter bodily in these various countries, nor did she transfer to them the machinery of the Papal government as it existed in her own capital. It was not in the least necessary that she should do so. She gained her end quite as effectually by legates-a-latere, by Concordats, by bishops, by bulls, by indulgences, and by a power that stood behind all the others and lent them its sanction and force – namely, the Infallibility – a fiction, no doubt, but to the Romanist a

reality – a moral omnipotence, which he no more dared disobey than he dared disobey God, for to him it was God. The Infallibility enabled the Pope to gather the whole Romanist community dispersed over the world into one army, which, obedient to its leader, could be put in motion from its center to its wide circumference, as if it were one man, forming an array of political, spiritual, and material force, which had not its like on earth.

Nor, when he entered the dominions of another sovereign, did the Pontiff. put down the throne, and rule himself in person. Neither was this in the least necessary. He left the throne standing, together with the whole machinery of the government tribunals, institutions, the army – all as aforesaid, but he deprived them of all force, and converted them into the instrumentalities and channels of Papal rule. They were made outlying portions of the Pontifical monarchy. Thus did Rome knit into one great federation the diverse nationalities and kingdoms of Western Europe. One and the same character – namely, the theocratic – did she communicate to all of them. She made all obedient to one will, and subservient to one grand scheme of policy. The ancient Rome had exhibited a marvelous genius for welding the nations into one, and teaching them obedience to her behests; but her proudest triumphs in this field were eclipsed by the yet greater success of Papal Rome. The latter found a more powerful principle of cohesion wherewith to cement the nations than any known to the former, and she had, moreover, the art to imbue them with a spirit of profounder submission than was ever yielded to her pagan predecessor; and, as a consequence, while the Empire of the Caesars preserved its unity unbroken, and its strength unimpaired, for only a brief space, that of the Popes has continued to flourish in power and great glory for well-nigh a thousand years.

Such was the constitution of Christendom as fully developed at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth

century. The verdict of Adam Smith, pronounced on Rome, viewed as the head and mistress of this vast confederation, expresses only the sober truth: "The Church of Rome," said he, "is the most formidable combination that ever was formed against the authority and security of civil government, as well as against the liberty, reason, and happiness of mankind." It is no mere scheme of ecclesiastical government that is before us, having for its aim only to guide the consciences of men in those matters that appertain to God, and the salvation of their souls. It is a so-called Superhuman Jurisdiction, a Divine Vicegerency, set up to govern men in their understandings and consciences, in their goods, their liberties, and their lives. Against such a power mere earthly force would have naught availed. Reason and argument would have fought against it in vain. Philosophy and literature, raillery and skepticism, would have shot their bolts to no purpose. A Divine assailant only could overthrow it: that assailant was PROTESTANTISM.

FOOTNOTES

VOLUME FIRST

BOOK FOURTH

VOLUME FIRST- BOOK FOURTH- CHAPTER 1

none

VOLUME FIRST- BOOK FOURTH- CHAPTER 2

[1] Muller, *Univ. Hist.*, vol. 2, p. 427; Lond., 1818.

[2] Villers, *Essay on the Reformation*, pp. 193 – 195.

[3] *The insignia were kept in one of the churches of Nuremberg; Misson, who traveled 200 years ago, describes them. The diadem or crown of Charlemagne is of gold and weighs fourteen pounds. It is covered nearly all over with precious stones, and is surmounted by a cross. The scepter and globe are of gold. "They say," remarks Misson, "that the sword was brought by an angel from heaven. The robe called Dalmatick of Charlemagne is of a violet color, embroidered*

with pearls, and strewed with eagles of gold, and a great number of jewels. There are likewise the cope, the stole; the gloves, the breeches, the stockings, and the buskins." (Maximilian Misson, *New Voyage to Italy, etc.*, vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 117; Lond., 1739.)

[4] An Itinerary written by Fynes Moryson, Gent., first in the Latin tongue, and then translated by him into English; containing his ten years travell through the twelve dominions of Germany, Bohmerland, Sweitzerland, Netherland, Denmark, Poland, Italy, Turkey, France, England, Scotland, and Ireland. Fol.; Lond., 1617. Pt. 3, p. 191.

[5] Muller, vol. 2, p. 432.

[6] Ezekiel 31:3-5

[7] Muller, *Univ. Hist.*, vol. 3, sec. 1, p. 2; Lond., 1818. "If the tide of events had followed in the sixteenth century, and in those which succeeded, the course in which it had hitherto flowed, nothing could have saved Europe from approaching servitude, and the yoke of an universal monarchy." (Villers, *Essay on the Spirit and Influence of the Reformation of Luther*, sec. 4, p. 125; Lond., 1805.)

VOLUME FIRST- BOOK FOURTH- CHAPTER 3

[1] Sir James Melville informs us that the bloody war which broke out between France and Spain in the reign of Henry II. was preceded by the Papal legate absolving the King of France from all the oaths and treaties by which he had ratified the peace between the two kingdoms 1027

but a little before. "As legate," said Caraffa, "from God's Vicar [Paul IV.] he would give him full absolution, he having power to bind and loose." (*Memoirs of Sir James Melvil*, p. 38; Edin., 1735.)

[2] Details regarding the functions of the legate-a-latere, and the acts in which his powers were shown, will be found in Dupin, *Biblioth.*, tom. 8, p. 56; also tom. 9, pp. 220, 223; and tom. 10, p. 126. Fleury, *Eccl. Hist.*, tom. 18, p. 225. Maimbourg, *Hist. du Pontific de S. Gregory le Grand*; also in *Words of Peace and Justice, etc.*, on the subject of

"Diplomatic Relations with the Holy See," by the Right Rev. Nicholas Wiseman, D.D., Bishop of Melipotamus, Pro. V.A.L.D.; Lond., Charles Dolman, 1848.

[3] *The interdict began to be employed in the ninth century; the practice of missioning legates-a-latere dates from the tenth; both expedients were invented and brought into use a little before the breaking out of that great war between the Papacy and the Empire, which was to decide the question which was the stronger. The interdict and the legate materially contributed to the success which attended the Church in that conflict, and which made the mitre triumphant over the Empire.*

[4] *Let us, by way of illustration, look at the Concordat framed so recently as 1855 with Southern Germany, then under the House of Austria. Besides the privileges specified above, that Concordat gave the bishops the sole government of the priests; they could punish them according to canon law, and the priest had no appeal from the penal jurisdiction of the Church. If any one dared to appeal to the civil tribunals, he was instantly smitten with excommunication. Equally in the power of the bishops were all schools and teachers, nor could one give religious instruction in even the university without the episcopal sanction. The bishops moreover had the independent administration of all the lands and property of the Church and of the religious houses. They were guaranteed in free communication with Rome, in the independent exercise of their own discipline irrespective of the civil law, which amounted to the enforcement of canon law on all the subjects of the realm, in all cases in which the bishops saw fit to apply it. And they were, in fine, reinstated in their ancient penal jurisdiction. On the principle Ex uno disce omnes, we are forced to the conclusion that the bondage of medieval Christendom was complete, and that that bondage 1028*

was to a far greater degree spiritual than temporal. It had its origin in the Roman Church; it was on the conscience and intellect that it pressed, and it gave its sanction to the temporal fetters in which the men of those ages were held.

[5] We quote one or two of the clauses of the oath: – “I will be faithful and obedient to our lord the Pope and to his successors. . . . In preserving and defending the Roman Papacy and the regalia of St. Peter, I will be their assistant against all men. . . . Heretics, schismatics, and rebels to our same lord, I will [pro posse pro persequar et impugnabo] persecute and attack to the utmost of my power.” (Decretum Greg. IX., lib. 2, tit. 24.)

[6] Progetto di Legge relativo alla Soppressione di Corporazione Religiose e Disposizione sull’ asse Ecclesiastico – Camera dei Deputati, Sess. 1863, No. 159. Relazione della Commissione composta dei Deputati, etc., sul Progetto di Legge presentato dal Ministro di Grazia e Giustizia e dei Culti – Sess. 1863, No. 159, A. Resoconto dell’ Amministrazione della casa Ecclesiastica; presentato dall’ Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri, Ministro dell’ Finanze – Sess. 1863, No. 215, A. Progetto di Legge. Soppressione delle decime Eccles. – Sess. 1863, No. 158.

[7] Progetto di Legge relativo alla Soppressione di Corporazione Religiose e Disposizione sull’ asse Ecclesiastico – Camera dei Deputati, Sess. 1863, No. 159. Relazione della Commissione composta dei Deputati, etc., sul Progetto di Legge presentato dal Ministro di Grazia e Giustizia e dei Culti – Sess. 1863, No. 159, A. These and the above-quoted documents were printed, but not published, and we owe the use of them to the politeness of Sig. Malau, formerly member of the Italian Parliament.

[8] “Jurisdictionem habet universalem in toto mundo papa, nedum in spiritualibus sed temporalibus.” (Alvarus Pelagius, De Planctu Eccles., lib. 1, cap. 13.)