

History of the Papacy Chapter I.

Origin of the Papacy



The Papacy, next to Christianity, is the great FACT of the modern world. Of the two, the former, unhappily, has proved in some respects the more powerful spring in human affairs, and has acted the more public part on the stage of the world. Fully to trace the rise and development of this stupendous system, were to write a history of Western Europe. The decay of empires,—the extinction of religious systems,—the dissolution and renewal of society,—the rise of new States,—the change of manners, customs, and laws,—the policy of courts,—the wars of kings,—the decay and revival of letters, of philosophy and of arts,—all connect themselves with the history of the Papacy, to whose growth they ministered, and whose destiny they helped to unfold. On so wide a field of investigation neither our time nor our limits permit us to enter. Let it suffice that we indicate, in general terms, the main causes that contributed to the rise of this tremendous Power, and the successive stages that marked the course of its portentous development.

The first rise of the Papacy is undoubtedly to be sought for in the corruption of human nature. Christianity, though pure in itself, was committed to the keeping of imperfect beings. The age, too, was imperfect, and abounded with causes tending to corrupt whatever was simple, and materialize whatever was spiritual. Society was pervaded on all sides with sensuous and material influences. These absolutely unfitted the age for relishing, and especially for retaining, truth in its abstract form, and for perceiving the beauty and grandeur of a purely spiritual economy. The symbolic worship of the Jew, heaven-appointed, had taught him to associate religious truth with visible rites, and to attribute considerably more importance to the observance of the outward ceremony than to the cultivation of the inward habit, or the performance of the mental act. Greece, too, with all its generous sensibilities, its strong emotions, and its quick perception and keen relish of the beautiful, was a singularly gross and materialized land. Its voluptuous poetry and sensuous mythology had unfitted the intellect

of its people for appreciating the true grandeur of a simple and spiritual system. Italy, again, was the land of gods and of arms. The former was a type of human passions; and the latter, though lightened by occasional gleams of heroic virtue and patriotism, exerted, on the whole, a degrading and brutalizing effect upon the character and genius of the people, withdrawing them from efforts of pure mind, and from the contemplation of the abstract and the spiritual. It was in this complex corruption,—the degeneracy of the individual and the degeneracy of society, owing to the unspiritualizing influences then powerfully at work in the Jewish, the Grecian, and the Roman worlds,—that the main danger of Christianity consisted; and in this element it encountered an antagonist a thousand times more formidable than the sword of Rome. Amid these impure matters did the Papacy germinate, though not till a subsequent age did it appear above ground. The corruption took a different form, according to the prevailing systems and the predominating tastes of the various countries. The Jew brought with him into the Church the ideas of the synagogue, and attempted to graft the institutions of Moses upon the doctrines of Christ; the Greek, unable all at once to unlearn the lessons and cast off the yoke of the Academy, attempted to form an alliance between the simplicity of the gospel and his own subtle and highly imaginative philosophy; while the Roman, loath to think that the heaven of his gods should be swept away as the creation of an unbridled fancy, recoiled from the change, as we would from the dissolution of the material heavens; and, though he embraced Christianity, he still clung to the forms and shadows of a polytheism in the truth and reality of which he could no longer believe. Thus the Jew, the Greek, the Roman, were alike in that they corrupted the simplicity of the gospel; but they differed in that each corrupted it after his own fashion. Minds there were of a more vigorous cast originally, or more largely endowed with the Spirit's grace, who were able to take a more tenacious grasp of truth, and to appreciate more highly her spirituality and simplicity; but as regards the majority of converts, especially towards the end of the first century and the beginning of the second, it is undeniable that they felt, in all their magnitude, the difficulties now enumerated.

The new ideas had a painful conflict to maintain with the old. The world had taken a mighty step in advance. It had accomplished a transition from the symbolic to the spiritual,—from the fables, allegories, and myths, which a false philosophy and a sensuous poetry had invented to amuse its infancy, to the clear, definite, and spiritual ideas which Christianity had provided for the exercise of its manhood. But it seemed as if the transition was too great. There was a felt inability in the human mind, as yet, to look with open face upon TRUTH; and men were fain to interpose the veil of symbol between themselves and the glory of that Majestic Form. It was seen that the world could not pass by a single step from infancy to manhood,—that the Creator had imposed certain laws upon the growth of the species, as on that of the individual,—upon the development of the social, as on that of the personal mind; and that these laws could not be violated. It was seen, in short, that so vast a reformation could not be made; it must grow. So much had been foreshadowed, we apprehend, by those parables of the Saviour which were intended as illustrative of the nature of the gospel kingdom and the manner of its progress: "The kingdom of heaven cometh not with observation;" "It is like a grain of mustard-seed, the least of all seeds; but when it is

grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree;" "It is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened." Not in a single day was the master idea of Christianity to displace the old systems, and inaugurate itself in their room. It was to progress in obedience to the law which regulates the growth of all great changes. First, the seed had to be deposited in the bosom of society; next, a process of germination had to ensue; the early and the latter rains of the Pagan and the Papal persecutions had to water it; and it was not till after ages of silent growth, during which society was to be penetrated and leavened by the quickening spirit of the gospel, that Christianity would begin her universal and triumphant reign.

But as yet the time was not come for a pure spiritual Christianity to attain dominion upon the earth. The infantile state of society forbade it. As, in the early ages, men had not been able to retain, even when communicated to them, the knowledge of one self-existent, independent, and eternal Being, so now they were unable to retain, even when made known to them, the pure spiritual worship of that Being. From this it might have been inferred, though prophecy had been silent on the point, that the world had yet a cycle of progress to pass through ere it should reach its manhood; that an era was before it, during which it would be misled by grievous errors, and endure, in consequence, grievous sufferings, before it could attain the faculty of broad, independent, clear, spiritual conception, and become able to think without the help of allegory, and to worship without the aid of symbol. This reconciles us to the fact of the great apostacy, so stumbling at first view. Contemplated in this light, it is seen to be a necessary step in the world's progress towards its high destinies, and a necessary preparation for the full unfolding of God's plans towards the human family.

The recovery of the world from the depth into which the Fall has plunged it, is both a slow and a laborious process. The instrumentality which God has ordained for its elevation is knowledge. Great truths are discovered, one after one; they are opinion first,—they become the basis of action next; and thus society is lifted up, by slow degrees, to the platform where the Creator has ordained it shall ultimately stand. A great principle, once discovered, can never be lost; and thus the progress of the world is steadily onward. Truth may not be immediately operative. To recur to the Saviour's figure, it may be the seed sown in the earth. It may be confined to a single bosom, or to a single book, or to a single school; but it is part of the constitution of things; it is agreeable to the nature of God, and in harmony with his government; and so it cannot perish. Proofs begin to gather around it; events fall out which throw light upon it: the martyr dies for it; society suffers by neglecting to shape its course in conformity with it; other minds begin to embrace it; and after reaching a certain stage, its adherents increase in geometrical progression: at last the whole of society is leavened; and thus the world is lifted a stage higher, never again to be let down. The stage, we say, once fully secured, is never altogether lost; for the truth, in fighting its way, has left behind it so many monuments of its power, in the shape of the errors and sufferings, as well as of the emancipation, of mankind, that it becomes a great landmark in the progress of our race. It attains in the social mind all the clearness and certainty of an axiom. The history of the

world, when read aright, is not so much a record of the follies and wickedness of mankind, as it is a series of moral demonstrations,—a slow process of experimental and convincing proof,—in reference to great principles, and that on a scale so large, that the whole world may see it, and understand it, and come to act upon it. Society can be saved not otherwise than as the individual is saved: it must be convinced of sin; its mind must be enlightened; its will renewed; it must be brought to embrace and act upon truth; and when in this way it has been sanctified, society shall enter upon its rest.

This we take to be the true theory of the world's progress. There is first an objective revelation of truth; there is second a subjective revelation of it. The objective revelation is the work of God alone; the subjective revelation, that is, the reception of it by society, is the work of God and man combined. The first may be done in a day or an hour; the second is the slow operation of an age. Thus human progression takes the form of a series of grand epochs, in which the world is suddenly thrown forward in its course, and then again suddenly stands still, or appears to retrograde. The first is known, in ordinary speech, as reformation or revolution; the second is termed re-action. There is, however, in point of fact, no retrogression: what we mistake for retrogression is only society settling down, after the sun-light burst of newly-revealed truth is over, to study, to believe, and to apply the principles which have just come into its possession. This is a work of time, often of many ages; and not unfrequently does it go on amid the confusion and conflict occasioned by the opposition offered to the new ideas by the old errors. Among the epochs of the past,—the grand objective revelations,—we may instance, as the more influential ones, the primeval Revelation, the Mosaic Economy, the Christian Era, and the Reformation. Each of these advanced the world a stage, from which it never altogether fell back into its former condition: society always made good its advance. Nevertheless, each of these epochs was followed by a re-action, which was just society struggling to lay hold upon the principles made known to it, thoroughly to incorporate them with its own structure, and so to make ready for a new and higher step. The world progresses much as the tide rises on the beach. Society in progress presents as sublime and fearful a spectacle as the ocean in a storm. As the mountain billow, crested with foam, swells huge and dark against the horizon, and comes rolling along in thunder, it threatens not only to flood the beach, but to submerge the land; but its mighty force is arrested and dissolved on its sandy barrier: the waters retire within the ocean's bed, as if they had received a counter-stroke from the earth. One would think that the ocean had spent its power in that one effort; but it is not so. The resistless energies of the great deep recruit themselves in an instant: another mountain wave is seen advancing; another cataract of foaming waters is poured along the beach; and now the level of the tide stands higher than before. Thus, by a series of alternate flows and ebbs does the ocean fill its shores. This natural phenomenon is but the emblem of the manner in which society advances. After some great epoch, the new ideas seem to lose ground,—the waters are diminished; but gradually the limit between the new ideas and the old prejudices comes to be adjusted, and then it is found that the advantage is on the side of truth, and that the general level of society stands perceptibly higher. Meanwhile, preparation is being made for a new conquest.

The regenerative instrumentalities with which the Creator has endowed the world, by the truths which He has communicated, are silently at work at the bottom of society. Another mighty wave appears upon its agitated surface; and, rolling onwards in irresistible power against the dry land of superstition, it adds a new domain to the empire of Truth.

But while it is true that the world has been steadily progressive, and that each successive epoch has placed society on a higher platform than that which went before it, it is at the same time a fact, that the development of superstition has kept equal pace with the development of truth. From the very beginning the two have been the counterparts of each other, and so will it be, doubtless, while they exist together upon the earth. In the early ages idolatry was unsophisticated in its creed and simple in its forms, just as the truths then known were few and simple. Under the Jewish economy, when truth became embodied in a system of doctrines with an appointed ritual, then, too, idolatry provided its system of metaphysical subtleties to ensnare the mind, and its splendid ceremonial to dazzle the senses. Under the Christian dispensation, when truth has attained its amplest development, in form at least, if not as yet in degree, idolatry is also more fully developed than in any preceding era. Papal idolatry is a more subtle, complicated, malignant, and perfected system than Pagan idolatry was. This equal development is inevitable in the nature of the case. The discovery of any one truth necessitates the invention of the opposite error. In proportion as truth multiplies its points of assault, error must necessarily multiply its points of defence. The extension of the one line infers the extension of the other also. Nevertheless there is an essential difference betwixt the two developments. Every new truth is the addition of another impregnable position to the one side; whereas every new error is but the addition of another untenable point to the other, which only weakens the defence. Truth is immortal, because agreeable to the laws by which the universe is governed; and therefore, the more it is extended, the more numerous are the points on which it can lean for support upon God's government; the more that error is extended, the more numerous the points in which it comes into collision and conflict with that government. Thus the one develops into strength, the other into weakness. And thus, too, the full development of the one is the harbinger of its triumph,—the full development of the other is the precursor of its downfall.

Idolatry at the first was one, and necessarily so, for it drew its existence from the same springs which were seated in the depth of the early ages. But, though one originally, in process of time it took different forms, and was known by different names, in the several countries. The Magian philosophy had long prevailed in the East; in the West had arisen the polytheism of Rome; while in Greece, forming the link between Asia and Europe, and combining the contemplative and subtle character of the Eastern idolatries with the grossness and latitudinarianism of those of the West, there flourished a highly imaginative but sensuous mythology. As these idolatries were one in their essence, so they were one in their tendency; and the tendency of all was, to draw away the heart from God, to hem in the vision of man by objects of sense, and to create a strong disrelish for the contemplation of a spiritual Being, and a strong incapacity for the apprehension and retention

of spiritual and abstract truth. These idolatries had long since passed their prime; but the powerful bent they had given to the human mind still existed. It was only by a slow process of counteraction that that evil bias could be overcome. So long had these superstitions brooded over the earth, and so largely had they impregnated the soil with their evil principles, that their eradication could not be looked for but by a long and painful conflict on the part of Christianity. It was to be expected, that after the first flush of the gospel's triumph there would come a recoil; that the ancient idolatries, recovering from their panic, would rally their forces, and appear again, not in any of their old forms,—for neither does superstition nor the gospel ever revive under exactly its old organization,—but under a new form adapted to the state of the world, and the character of the new antagonist now to be confronted; and that Satan would make a last, and, of course, unexampled struggle, before surrendering to Christ the empire of the world. It was to be expected also, in the coming conflict, that all these idolatries would combine into one phalanx. It was extremely probable that the animosities and rivalships which had hitherto kept them apart would cease; that the schools and sects into which they had been divided would coalesce; that, recognising in Christianity an antagonist that was alike the foe of them all, the common danger would make them feel their common brotherhood; and thus, that all these false systems would come to be united into one comprehensive and enormous system, containing within itself all the principles of hostility, and all the elements of strength, formerly scattered throughout them all; and that in this combined and united form would they do battle with the Truth.

It was not long till symptoms began to appear of such a move on the part of Satan,—of such a resuscitation of the ancient Paganisms. The shadow began to go back on the dial of Time. The spiritual began to lose ground before the symbolic and the mythological. The various idolatries which had formerly covered the wide space which the gospel now occupied,—subjugated, but not utterly exterminated,—began to pay court to Christianity. They professed, as the handmaids, to do homage to the Mistress; but their design in this insidious friendship was not to aid her in her glorious mission, but to borrow her help, and so reign in her room. Well they knew that they had been overtaken by that decrepitude which, sooner or later, overtakes all that is sprung of earth; but they thought to draw fresh vitality from the living side of Christianity, and so rid themselves of the burden of their anility. The Magian religion wooed her in the East; Paganism paid court to her in the West: Judaism, too, esteeming, doubtless, that it had a better right than either, put in its claim to be recognized. Each brought her something of its own, which, it pretended, was necessary to the perfection of Christianity. Judaism brought her dead symbols; the Magian and Greek philosophies brought her refined and subtile, but dead speculations and doctrines; and the Paganism of Rome brought her dead divinities. On all hands was she tempted to part with the substance, and to embrace again the shadow. Thus did the old idolatries muster under the banner of Christianity. They rallied in her support,—so they professed; but, in reality, to unite their arms for her overthrow.

Two things might have been expected to happen. First, that the rising corruption would reach its maturest proportion in that country where external

influences most favoured its development; and second, that when developed, it would exhibit the master traits and leading peculiarities of each of the ancient paganisms. Both these anticipations were exactly realised. It was not in Chaldea, nor in Egypt, the seats of the Magian philosophy, nor was it in Greece, that Popery arose, for these countries now retained little besides the traditions of their former power. It was in the soil of the Seven Hills, amid the trophies of unnumbered victories, the symbols of universal empire, and the gorgeous rites of a polluting polytheism, that Romanism, *velut arbor oevo*, grew up. By a law similar to that which guides the seed to the spot best fitted for its germination, did the modern Paganism strike its roots in the soil which the ancient Paganism had most largely impregnated with its influences and tendencies. The surrounding heresies were speedily overshadowed and dwarfed. The Gnostic, and other errors, declined in the proportion in which Romanism waxed in stature, its mighty trunk drawing to itself all those corrupt influences which would otherwise have afforded nourishment to them. In process of time they disappeared, though rather through a process of absorption than of extinction. The result presents us with a sort of Pantheism,—the only sort of Pantheism that is real,—in which the expiring idolatries returned into the bosom of their parent divinity, and had their existence prolonged in its existence. The Papacy is a new Babel, in which the old redoubtable idolatries are the builders. It is a spiritual Pantheon, in which the local and vagrant superstitions find again a centre and a home. It is a grand mausoleum, in which the corpses of the defunct Paganisms, like the mummied monks of Kreutzberg, are laid out in ghastly pomp, while their disembodied spirits still live in the Papacy, and govern the world from their grave. Analyse Popery, and you will find all these ancient systems existing in it. The Magian philosophy flourishes anew under the monastic system; for in the conventual life of Rome we find the contemplative moods and the ascetic habits which so largely prevailed in Egypt and over all the East; and here, too, we find the fundamental principle of that philosophy, namely, that the flesh is the seat of evil, and, consequently, that it becomes a duty to weaken and mortify the body. In Popery we find the predominating traits of the Grecian philosophy, more especially in the subtle casuistry of the Popish schools, combined with a sensuous ritual, the celebration of which is often accompanied, as in Greece of old, with gross licentiousness. And last of all, there is palpably present in Popery the polytheism of ancient Rome, in the gods and goddesses which, under the title of saints, fill up the calendar and crowd the temples of the Romish Church. Here, then, all the old idolatries live over again. There is nothing new about them but the organization, which is more perfect and complete than ever. To add one other illustration to those already given, the Papacy is a gigantic realization of our Lord's parable. The Roman empire, on the introduction of Christianity, was swept and garnished; the unclean spirit which inhabited it had been driven out of it; but the demon had never wandered far from the region of the Seven Hills; and finding no rest, he returned, bringing with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, which took possession of their old abode, and made its last state worse than its first. The name of Popery, truly, is Legion! "There are many Antichrists," said the apostle John; for in his days the various systems of error had not been combined into one. But the Roman apostacy acquired ultimately the dominion, and, marshalling the other heresies beneath its

banner, gave its own name to the motley host, and became known as the Antichrist of prophecy and of history.

Popery, then, we hold to be an after-growth of Paganism, whose deadly wound, dealt by the spiritual sword of Christianity, was healed. Its oracles had been silenced, its shrines demolished, and its gods consigned to oblivion; but the deep corruption of the human race, not yet cured by the promised effusion of the Spirit upon all flesh, revived it anew, and, under a Christian mask, reared other temples in its honour, built it another Pantheon, and replenished it with other gods, which, in fact, were but the ancient divinities under new names. All idolatries, in whatever age or country they have existed, are to be viewed but as successive developments of the one grand apostacy. That apostacy was commenced in Eden, and consummated at Rome. It had its rise in the plucking of the forbidden fruit; and it attained its acme in the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome,—Christ's Vicar on earth. The hope that he would "be as God," led man to commit the first sin; and that sin was perfected when the Pope "exalted himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." Popery is but the natural development of this great original transgression. It is just the early idolatries ripened and perfected. It is manifestly an enormous expansion of the same intensely malignant and fearfully destructive principle which these idolatries contained. The ancient Chaldean worshipping the sun,—the Greek deifying the powers of nature,—and the Roman exalting the race of primeval men into gods, are but varied manifestations of the same evil principle, namely, the utter alienation of the heart from God,—its proneness to hide itself amid the darkness of its own corrupt imaginations, and to become a god unto itself. That principle received the most fearful development which appears possible on earth, in the Mystery of Iniquity which came to be seated on the Seven Hills; for therein man deified himself, became God, nay, arrogated powers which lifted him high above God. Popery is the last, the most matured, the most subtle, the most skilfully contriven, and the most essentially diabolical form of idolatry which the world ever saw, or which, there is reason to believe, it ever will see. It is the *ne plus ultra* of man's wickedness, and the *chef d'oeuvre* of Satan's cunning and malignity. It is the greatest calamity, next to the Fall, which ever befell the human family. Farther away from God the world could not exist at all. The cement that holds society together, already greatly weakened, would be altogether destroyed, and the social fabric would instantly fall in ruins.[\[1\]](#)

Having thus indicated the origin of Romanism, we shall attempt in the three following chapters to trace its rise and progress.

[1] It follows from the principles taught in this chapter, that the Church (so called) of Rome has no right to rank amongst Christian Churches. She is not a Church, neither is her religion the Christian religion. We are accustomed to speak of Popery as a corrupt form of Christianity. We concede too much. The Church of Rome bears the same relation to the Church of Christ which the hierarchy of Baal bore to the institute of Moses; and Popery stands

related to Christianity only in the same way in which Paganism stood related to primeval Revelation. Popery is not a corruption simply, but a transformation. It may be difficult to fix the time when it passed from the one into the other; but the change is incontestible. Popery is the gospel transubstantiated into the flesh and blood of Paganism, under a few of the accidents of Christianity.

Continued in [History of the Papacy Chapter II. Rise and Progress of Ecclesiastical Supremacy.](#)

All chapters History of the Papacy

- [History of the Papacy By Rev. J.A. Wylie, LL.D](#)
- [Chapter I. Origin of the Papacy](#)
- [Chapter II. Rise and Progress of Ecclesiastical Supremacy.](#)
- [Chapter III. Rise and Progress of the Temporal Sovereignty.](#)
- [Chapter IV. Rise and Progress of the Temporal Supremacy.](#)
- [Chapter V. Foundation and Extent of the Supremacy.](#)
- [Chapter VI. The Canon Law](#)
- [Chapter VII. That the Church of Rome Neither has Nor Can Change Her Principles on the Head of the Supremacy](#)