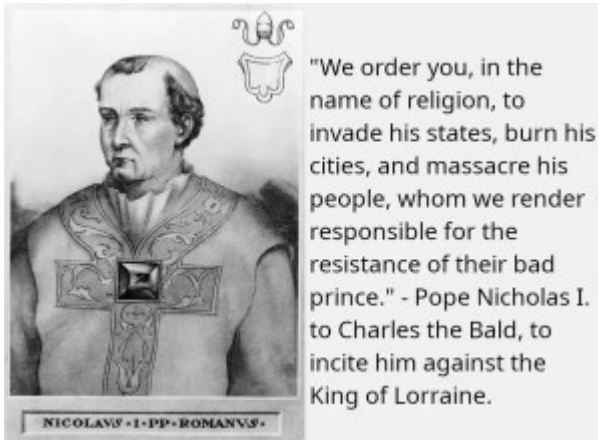


The Papacy And The Civil Power –

Chapter XII. The Ninth Century



Pope Nicholas I. 800 - 867

Continued from [Chapter XI. Pepin.](#)

The Popes Subjects of the Eastern Empire.—The Ninth Century.—The Emperor Leo V. and Pope Pascal I.—Image-worship.—Church of St. Cecilia in Rome.—Louis le Debonnaire.—Factions at Rome.—Constitution of Lothaire.—Eugenius II. and Valentine.—Gregory IV.—Sergius. —Death of Pope Leo IV.—The Alleged Popess Joan.—Peter-pence. East separates from West.—Nicholas I. claims Universal Power.—His Manner of exercising it.—Boniface VI. poisoned by Stephen VII.—Trial of Dead Pope.—The Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals.—Victor I. and the Celebration of Easter.—Polycarp and Anacetus.—Ireneus.—The Character of the Decretals.—The Papal System based upon them.—All False and Forged.

IF, as Pius IX. and his Jesuit allies affirm, the temporal power of the pope is included in the spiritual, and has, like it, a divine origin, it must necessarily have a like universality with Christianity itself. It is in this sense that it is claimed to belong to “the primacy of Peter,” and is considered essential to the pope’s ecclesiastical supremacy over the world. Our investigations into its origin and growth, therefore, should be limited only by the means within our reach.

If it is in reality divine, and necessary, either at Rome or elsewhere, to the existence and dissemination of true religion, and if the liberalism and civilization of society based upon principles in opposition to it are injurious instead of beneficial to mankind, then its legitimacy, with all its attendant authority and consequences, should be conceded, in order that the papacy may have supreme jurisdiction over the world, and be able to bring all laws and institutions into harmony with its own conceptions of the divine will. But if, on the other hand, it has been the result of usurpation, fraud, and imposture, and if the world has been improved and advanced in proportion as it has escaped and separated from its influence, then those who are now so clamorous for its restoration should be held to be unsafe counselors, and be dealt with accordingly.

But whether it is the one or the other—whether it is to be restored at Rome or in any other part of the world—the study of its history is in every sense instructive, inasmuch as we can in no other way be brought into familiarity

with the papacy, or comprehend fully the nature and character of the extraordinary pretensions now set up in its behalf. We should not expect good and beneficent results to flow from that which is founded upon fraud and wrong, if it shall appear to have been thus founded.

The question is constantly recurring—why should there have been such delay in the establishment of this tremendous power, if Christ or the apostles designed that belief in its necessity should be made an essential and indispensable part of the system of Christian faith? Manifestly they did not so design, or they would have taught it by some word or sign which would have come down to our age, by the Scriptures, or by tradition from the apostles. But nothing of this kind has reached us by either of these modes. Paul was imprisoned and martyred at Rome by the civil authority; and, if Peter was ever there, he met a similar fate. The several persecutions through which the early Christians passed originated with, and were conducted by, the same authority. And nowhere, in any history of the first centuries, is there a single word affirming that either Peter or Paul, or any bishop of the Roman or any other church, possessed the power of a temporal prince. On the other hand, in those primitive days of the Church the bishops and clergy devoted themselves to the work given them to do by the Master, and made it the study and effort of their lives to imitate his example of benevolence, humility, and love. They did not strive after the honors, wealth, or power of this world after temporal scepters and the crowns of kings—but after the salvation of immortal souls. And yet he who today denies either the lawfulness or necessity of the pope's temporal power, if he belongs to the Roman Church, is excommunicated because he violates the true faith; and if he do not, is denounced, cursed, and anathematized as a heretic. And whole books are written, with learning and wonderful ingenuity, to prove that Christ's Church cannot exist without it!

The pope himself sends forth from his pretended prison his lamentations at its loss, and his followers forthwith combine themselves into a compact and formidable organization, demand assistance from the governments, *threaten another bloody crusade*, and pledge themselves never to remit their efforts until the crown of royalty is again placed upon the papal brow.

We have seen that this power did not exist in any form before the separation of Rome from Constantinople—of the West from the East—and also the effect of this separation upon its acquisition. This brings us to still more solid ground—to the investigation of events which, although not entirely free from difficulty, have a better foundation.

Mr. Hallam, who is accepted as undoubted authority on all hands, says: "The popes appear to have possessed some measure of temporal power, even while the city was professedly governed by the exarchs of Ravenna, in the name of the Eastern empire. This power became more extensive after her separation from Constantinople. It was, however, subordinate to the undeniable sovereignty of the new imperial family, who were supposed to enter upon all the rights of their predecessors. There was always an imperial officer, or prefect, in that city, to render criminal justice; *an oath of allegiance to the emperor was taken by the people*; and upon any irregular election of a pope, a circumstance by no means unusual, the emperors held themselves entitled to

interpose. But the spirit and even the institutions of the Romans were republican." (Hallam's "Middle Ages," ch. iii., part i., pp. 126, 127. Harper & Brothers' ed., 1843.)

Archbishop Kenrick is not ingenuous when he quotes the first two sentences of the above extract to show the existence of the temporal power before the separation from Constantinople, and its increase "*on* her separation from Constantinople." By the omission of all the latter part of what Mr. Hallam says, he fails to show the "undeniable sovereignty" of the empire, that an oath of allegiance to it was required, and that the emperor had the right to interfere even in the election of a pope. Why this omission? Manifestly because the whole of what Mr. Hallam says repudiates all idea of any sovereignty except that possessed by the emperors—a concession which even so fair a man as Archbishop Kenrick could not make while held in the toils of the papacy. But his omission is not so bad as his misquotation. For the purpose of making it appear that the immediate effect of the separation of Rome from Constantinople was a great increase of the temporal power, with the consent of the King, of France, he quotes the second sentence in the above extract from Mr. Hallam, thus:

"This power became more extensive *on* her separation from Constantinople." (Kenrick, p. 261.) Mr. Hallam did not use this language. The word employed by him is "*after*," not "*on*:" "this power became more extensive *after* her separation from Constantinople." To say that the result was produced "*on* the separation," is equivalent to stating that it followed directly as a consequence; where as if it were *after* that event, the growth may have been slow and gradual, each step the work of usurpation. And this is Mr. Hallam's meaning, which Archbishop Kenrick endeavors to obscure by misquoting him.

The ninth century opened under the influence of the new order of things. For *eight hundred years* Christianity had existed in the world, and had grown, strengthened, and prospered, under the guardianship of bishops and priests who had no jurisdiction over temporal affairs. Even the bishops of Rome, with all their pride and ambition, had been limited in their authority to spiritual affairs, and the occasional claims they set up for an enlargement of their powers served only to show them that no such enlargement could ever be obtained with the consent of the people, and that if obtained at all, it must be the result of a combination with princes—a conspiracy against popular government. They well knew that it would be impossible to acquire the possession of unlimited power in Rome without the accomplishment of two things—successful revolt against the Eastern emperors, and the destruction of the Roman republic. The achievement of the first gave them the means of bringing about the last result.

The immediate consequence of the protection given to the popes by the French monarchs was the exercise of tyrannical authority over the inferior bishops and clergy, the object being to make the single will of the pope the governing authority of the Church, not only in Rome, but all over the Christian world. Notwithstanding the recognized independence of the several churches during the apostolic times and for centuries afterward, and the unity of faith which had been then preserved by the diversities of local government, papal ambition soon became so all-absorbing as to see no other

motive in the management of church affairs but its own gratification. Cermenin, referring to the change thus produced in religion, says:

"...holy traditions were despised, the morality of Christ was outraged; the orthodoxy of the Church no longer consisted in anything but *the sovereignty of the pope*, the adoration of images, and the invocation of saints; in sacred singing, the solemnity of masses, and the pomps of ceremonies; in the consecration of temples, splendid churches, monastic vows, and pilgrimages.

"Rome imposed its fanaticism and its superstitions on all the other churches; morality, faith, and true piety were replaced by cupidity, ambition, and luxury; the ignorance of the clergy was so profound that a knowledge of the singing of the Lord's Prayer, the creed, and the service of the mass was all that was demanded from princes and ecclesiastical dignitaries." (Cermenin, vol. i., pp. 211, 212.)

Pascal I. became pope in the year 817. Leo V., the Emperor of the East, and Theodore, Patriarch of Constantinople, sent nuncios to him with the view of reconciling the disagreement between the Eastern and Western Christians in reference to the worship of images. But the pope, fearing that a reconciliation of this kind would lead to the impairment of his papal influence and put an end to the alliance with France—and caring far more for his temporal power than for the restoration of harmony in the Church—refused to receive the nuncios, or to hear any suggestions of compromise. He drove them out of Rome in disgrace, and, relying upon the protection of the King of France, had the impudence, soon after, to send legates to Constantinople, and command the emperor to restore the worship of images.

How much, at that time, a few mild words, and the meekness and charity of true Christianity, would have done for the cause of genuine religion may be seen by those who will examine the history of those times. If the conciliatory spirit of the Eastern emperor had been reciprocated by the Roman pontiff, the East and the West might have been today united in Christian bonds, and the Church of Rome might have spread her spiritual influence over all the world. But other objects filled the mind of Pope Pascal I., who was determined to maintain his own authority, whatever the result to Christianity and the Church. His stubbornness invited, naturally, a corresponding degree of illiberality on the part of the emperor, who caused the pope's envoys to be whipped through the streets of Constantinople, and the image-worshipers within his dominions to be treated with harshness and severity.

The pope now resorted to artifice to maintain himself. He invited the image-worshipers of the East to come to Rome, promising them protection. He rebuilt monasteries and churches for their accommodation, and, having exhausted his revenues in this undertaking, cunningly contrived an appeal to the superstition of his subjects, in order to extort further contributions from them. After rebuilding the Church of St. Cecilia, he placed her shrine upon its high altar; but the remains of the saint, who had been dead about six hundred years, were wanting to give sanctity to the place, and to excite the superstition of the attendants. With the view of discovering them, he convoked the people on Sunday, and, in their presence, fell into a supernatural sleep. After awaking, he declared that Cecilia had appeared to

him in a vision, and pointed with her finger to the place of her interment! He visited the spot, took a spade, dug up the earth, and "discovered the body of the saint clothed in a robe of tissue of gold," and with "*linen rags freshly impregnated with her blood!*" (Cormenin, vol. i., p. 214; "Encyclopedia Americana," vol. iii., p. 21, article *Cecilia*.)

These relics were removed to the church: the faithful were thereby excited to contribute largely of their wealth to the pontifical treasury, and an example was thus set which led to like imposture and fraud to such an extent that innumerable saints were fabricated in order that money might be raised by the sale of their bones—a practice which has been carried to such disgraceful and ridiculous extent that the wood of the true cross, the hair of the Virgin Mary, and that of St. John the Baptist, a part of the body of Christ himself, and hundreds of other equally impossible relics, have been, from time to time, fraudulently imposed as genuine upon the ignorant and deluded followers of the papacy. Such a state of things could not possibly exist without almost universal corruption and degeneracy at Rome, especially among the popes, priests, and lower clergy.

After the death of Charlemagne, Louis le Debonnaire, his son, became his successor as emperor, Germany having been added to the dominions of France. He was both weak and superstitious, and was easily subjected to the will of the pope. He sent his son Lothaire to Rome to be consecrated by the pope, who, when he reached there, was both surprised and shocked at the general depravity of morals which prevailed. He called the attention of Pope Pascal to it, and obtained from him a promise of reform; but so soon as Lothaire had left Rome, the pope caused two venerable priests to be arrested, charged them with having been informers, had their eyes put out, and their tongues dragged out, in his own presence, as punishment for their desire to reform the morals of the pope and clergy! (Cormenin, vol. i., p. 214.)

The Emperor Louis became indignant when he heard of this, and sent ambassadors to Rome to investigate the facts. Before these Pope Pascal solemnly swore he had nothing to do with it! They then demanded the delivery of the murderers, but this the pope refused, because they "were of the family of St. Peter, and that it was his duty to protect them against all the sovereigns of the world! (*Ibid.*)

That factions should have grown up under such a pope as this is not at all wonderful. They were excited to such a degree that at his death two popes were elected—one by the nobles and clergy, and the other by the people of Rome. The latter being the strongest, succeeded in placing Eugenius II. upon the pontifical throne. Being a Roman, and the representative of the people, he was disposed to suppress the general immorality which prevailed among the clergy, and for this purpose sought the aid of the Emperor Louis to put down the opposing faction. Louis again sent Lothaire to Rome, accompanied by the venerable Abbot of St. Denis, in France, to ascertain the true condition of affairs. When he reached there, he heard the complaints of the people, who represented to him that they had been stripped of their wealth by former popes, and greatly oppressed by their tyranny. Lothaire, indignant at these abuses and outrages, commanded the pope to restore to the citizens their property which had been unjustly confiscated, and endeavored to provide

against the repetition of these wrongs by the promulgation of a decree for securing to the people a voice in the government of their own affairs.

This constitution is important, as showing what might have been done for the cause of religion and reform, under an honest and unambitious pope, if Eugenius II. had lived long enough to provide for the faithful execution of its provisions. Among other things, it required that "equitable justice" should be rendered to the people; that "the exercise of the right of election of the chiefs of the Church" should not be impeded; that the emperor should be annually informed "in what manner justice has been rendered to the citizens," and how the constitution was observed; that the people of Rome should be asked "under what law they wished to live, in order that they may be judged according to the law which they shall have adopted;" and that all the dignitaries of the State should take an oath of fidelity to the emperor, which should be of superior obligation to their promise of fidelity to the Holy See. (Cormenin, vol. i., p. 215.)

This liberal constitution restored tranquility among the Roman people, which was greatly promoted by the proceedings of a council called by Pope Eugenius II., and the enactment by it of decrees looking to the reform of the clergy. But Eugenius died, after a pontificate of only three years, before any reformatory results were secured; leaving the clergy of Rome in a state of utter and debasing ignorance. They only knew how to follow the prescribed rules, to explain the Pater and the Credo, and to exact contributions from the people. Many of the inferior clergy could not distinguish the names of angels from those of devils, and, says Cormenini: "They believed that God was corporeal; they knew neither the creed of the apostles, nor that of the mass, nor that of St. Athanasius, nor even the Lord's Prayer." (Cormenin, vol. i., p. 217.)

Valentine, the successor of Eugenius II., would have done much to promote reform if he had lived; but it so happened that in those days the lives of such popes were of short duration. His pontificate lasted only five weeks. Upon his death Gregory IV., who was but a deacon, became pope. Though consecrated with the consent of the emperor, the latter wrote him, threatening to depose him if his conduct was not exemplary. At this Gregory became offended, and vowed that he would have revenge. This passion became more violent when, soon afterward, Louis compelled him to restore some property to the monastery of St. Mary, which he had illegally seized.

The first step incited by his pontifical vengeance was to stir up Lothaire to revolt against his father, under the promise that for this act of treason he should have the protection of the Church. History has recorded but few acts of perfidy so base as this. But it was a step in the road toward temporal and imperial power, and Pope Gregory IV. had no such conscientious scruples as forbade him to take it. He went to France to make his success more sure; and the French "Chronicle of St. Denis" says, that "the demons of hell animated all the children of Louis, and that Satan himself came in the person of the Bishop of Rome, under the charitable pretext as if he wished to establish peace between the emperor and his children, but in reality to excommunicate the monarch and the bishops who opposed the execrable wishes of these unnatural children." (*Ibid.*, vol. i., p. 219.)

The prelates of France, becoming indignant at the course of the pope, wrote him that if he persisted further in interfering with the temporal affairs of France, in violation of his oath of fidelity to the emperor, they would resist his ecclesiastical authority; and if he undertook to excommunicate them, they would defy him. Alarmed at this, he resolved upon leaving France. But before he carried this resolution into effect, his pride was excited by some monks who pretended to lay before him some declarations of the fathers and portions of the decrees of the Italian councils, which "declared him to be the supreme judge of all Christians." Stimulated by these means, he again resolved to consummate his own and the treason of Lothaire. Then, pretending to desire a reconciliation between him and his father, he visited the emperor's camp, where he was received with kindness.

While protesting to the emperor his "unutterable devotion," he was engaged in producing defection among his troops, "by presents, promises, or threats." Thus he succeeded in drawing away the troops from the emperor, and, after the pope left the camp, they went over to Lothaire, who made Louis prisoner, deprived him of his crown and royal robes, and made himself Emperor of the West, and King of France—all of which was directed and consecrated by this base and perfidious pope, whose conscience was not bound by either vow, pledge, or oath, however solemn. He was, nevertheless, infallible!

The people of France became excited to the highest degree by these movements. They refused to recognize Lothaire, drove him from the throne, and re-established Louis in power. Now it came his turn to be revenged upon the pope. For this purpose, he sent ambassadors to Rome to investigate his conduct; but, when they reached there, Gregory solemnly swore that he had rendered no assistance to Lothaire, that all his intentions were pure and innocent, and that he was devoted to Louis, whom he was ready to assist in punishing Lothaire, and his other children, for their treason! Louis, who was not only a weak prince, but kindhearted and excessively superstitious, forgave him and his children also, hoping to restore concord and quiet. But Lothaire, now realizing that the false-hearted pope had been making a tool of him to advance his own ambition, became furious at his new treachery, and ordered that both he and his priests should be treated with severity on account of it. This was also arrested by Louis, whose magnanimous conduct stands in striking contrast to that of this "execrable pontiff, who used religion as a plea to arm children against their father," and of whom a Roman Catholic pen has recorded that he was a "cowardly, knavish, perfidious, and sacrilegious priest, destitute of principles and faith." (Cormenin, vol. i., p. 220.)

The death of Louis led to a violent contest between his children; and to such disturbance throughout France as rendered the government and all public affairs insecure. Pope Sergius, successor to Gregory IV., had also an occasion to show himself the patron of treason growing out of these disorders, and to contribute by that means his example to the many others which, by the force of precedent, go to make up the law of the papacy. Nomenoe, a duke of Brittany, revolted against the King of Brittany, Charles the Bald, but was opposed by the bishops of the province. Lothaire, who favored the duke, sent large presents to the pope, and bribed him also to

take his side. He, accordingly, issued his papal decree commanding the bishops to recognize Nomenoe as king, under pain of deposition and anathema, thus invoking, as many other popes have done, both before and since, the aid of religion to accomplish worldly and ambitious ends. And while these examples present us with some of the instructive lessons taught by history, they also exhibit the manner in which the papal power grew, in a few centuries more, into enormous proportions.

The invasion of Italy by the Saracens put a stop, for a while, to the growth of the temporal power; but upon their defeat, under the pontificate of Leo IV., the affairs of the Church at Rome were thrown into such confusion that the few years following his death have never since ceased to be the cause of angry and acrimonious controversy. It is during these years when it is alleged that the Popess Joan occupied the pontifical chair, a matter not proper for discussion here. (*)

* This question is not without difficulty. Cormenin maintains that Joan was popess from A.D. 853, after the death of Leo IV., to 855, when the pontificate of Benedict III. commenced.—CORMENIN, vol. i., p. 225. But Butler, in his "Lives of the Saints," denies the whole story, and calls it "a most notorious forgery."—BUTLER, July 17th, article *St. Leo IV.* In this all the defenders of the papacy are agreed. In the chronological table of the popes published by the Church, they make Leo IV. pope up to A.D. 855, and Benedict III. his successor. But did he die in 853, as Cormenin asserts, or live until 855, as the papists assert? If he did, then there was either a Popess Joan, or an interregnum of more than two years. If he did not. but lived till 855, then there was neither the one nor the other. It is a question which may excite curiosity, but does not bear, in any form, upon that of the temporal power of the popes. Although Dr. Dollinger classes it along with the fables and myths of the Middle Ages, yet he says that there was no doubt, in the fifteenth century, about the existence of a female pope. According to him, her bust was placed in the cathedral at Sienna along with the busts of the other popes; and it was not till the seventeenth century that Pope Clement VIII. caused Joan to be "metamorphosed into Pope Zacharias." John Huss, at the Council of Constance, referred to the Popess Joan, and was not contradicted.—*Fables respecting the Popes of the Middle Ayes*, by Dollinger, pp. 30, 31.

About this time an event occurred Which contributed greatly to the increase of papal ambition. Ethelwolf, King of England, was a religious devotee—ardently enlisted in the papal cause. He visited Rome and had an interview with the pope, which resulted in his agreeing that the pope might levy Peter-pence all over his dominions, and in his agreeing to pay to him yearly large sums of money. Some historians allege that he made the kingdom of Great Britain tributary to the Holy See; but this, though not positively denied, is not stated by others. (Cormenin, vol. i., p.233; "Hist. of Eng.,"by Rapin, vol. i., p.309; "Hist. of Eng." by Lingard, vol. i., p. 95.)

However the fact may be, it is certain that the interview between King Ethelwolf and the pope did give greater impunity to those popes who were resolved upon interfering in the affairs of the nations. It was soon after this that the Eastern Christians, despairing of any compromise of their disagreements with Rome, resolved upon making their final separation from

those of the West. And Pope Nicholas I., thus rid of this perplexing controversy, was furnished with more leisure to increase his temporal authority. Surrounded by kings who were ready, as the German emperor did, to kiss his feet, and to put themselves under his protection, in order to keep upon their thrones, he resolved upon asserting, as one of the prerogatives of Peter, the right to rule over the world. In replying to a letter from the bishops of Lorraine, in which they declared their submission to him, he employed this extraordinary language:

"You affirm that you are submissive to your sovereign, in order to obey the words of the apostle Peter, who said, 'Be subject to the prince, because he is above all mortals in this world.' But you appear to forget that we, as the vicar of Christ, *have the right to judge all men*: thus, before obeying kings, you owe obedience to us; and if we declare a monarch guilty, you should reject him from your communion until we pardon him."

"We alone have the power to bind and to loose, to absolve Nero and to condemn him; and Christians cannot, under penalty of excommunication, execute other judgment than ours, which alone is infallible. *People are not the judges of their princes*; they should obey without murmuring the most iniquitous orders; they should bow their foreheads under the chastisements which it pleases kings to inflict on them; for a sovereign can violate the fundamental laws of the State, and seize upon the wealth of the citizen, by imposts or by confiscations; he can even dispose of their lives, without any of his subjects having the right to address to him simple remonstrances. But if we declare a king heretical and sacrilegious, if we drive him from the Church, clergy and laity, whatever their rank, *are freed from their oaths of fidelity, and may revolt against his power.*" (Cormenin, vol. i., p. 242.)

The same pope wrote to Charles the Bald, to incite him against the King of Lorraine, saying, "We order you, in the name of religion, to invade his states, burn his cities, and massacre his people, whom we render responsible for the resistance of their bad prince." (*Ibid.*, p. 243.)

He thus addressed an envoy from Constantinople: "Know, prince, that the vicars of Christ are above the judgment of mortals; and that the most powerful sovereigns have no right to punish the crimes of popes, how enormous soever they may be...; for no matter how scandalous or criminal may be the debaucheries of the pontiffs, you should obey them, for they are seated on the chair of St. Peter." (Cormenin.)

Again: "Fear, then, our wrath and the thunders of our vengeance; for Jesus Christ has appointed us with his own mouth absolute judges of all men; and kings themselves are submitted to our authority." (*Ibid.*, p. 244.)

When the King of Bulgaria became a convert to Christianity, he persecuted those of his subjects who refused to follow his example; and Pope Nicholas I. thus wrote him:

"I glorify you for having maintained your authority by putting to death those wandering sheep who refuse to enter the fold; and you not only have not sinned by showing a holy rigor, but I even congratulate you upon having

opened the kingdom of heaven to the people submitted to your rule. A king need not fear to *command massacres*, when these will retain his subjects in obedience, or cause them to submit to the faith of Christ; and God will reward him in this world, and in eternal life, for these murders." (*Ibid.*)

It should surprise no one to know that this pope so boldly asserted his infallibility as to claim equality with God. According to Gratian, he issued a pontifical decree, wherein he said: "It is evident that the popes can neither be bound nor unbound by any earthly power, nor even by that of the apostle, if he should return upon the earth; since Constantine the Great has recognized that *the pontiffs held the place of God upon earth*, the divinity not being able to be judged by any living man. We are, then, infallible, and *whatever may be our acts, we are not accountable for them but to ourselves.*" (*Ibid.*, p. 248.)

The Roman Catholic Church canonizes and places in her calendar of saints those whose devotion and piety she considers worthy of imitation. In this list she has placed seventy-six of her popes; and pointing out these saints to her children, she says to them that their lives exhibit "the most perfect maxims of the Gospel reduced to practice," point out "the true path," and lead, "as it were, by the hand into it, sweetly inviting and encouraging us to walk cheerfully in the steps of those that are gone before us." They are called "the greatest personages who have ever adorned the world, the brightest ornaments of the Church militant, and the shining stars and suns of the triumphant, our future companions in eternal glory." And "their penitential lives and holy maxims" are commended to the faithful, as furnishing "the sublime lessons of practical virtue." ("Lives of the Saints," by Butler, vol. i., preface, p. 46.)

Now, when we consider that this pope, Nicholas I., has been made a saint, ("Catholic Family Almanac," 1870, p. 47.) and that what he did and said is held in the most sacred remembrance, we cannot fail to realize the importance of scrutinizing closely the language employed by him in the foregoing decrees and encyclicals, and of knowing also their effect upon the acquisition of temporal power, and the ultimate consequences to which they led. Why was he made a saint if his pontificate was not designed as a model for imitation? Why should he be imitated, if his principles and policy are not to be made the principles and policy of all time? He was infallible, and could not err! He was in "the place of God upon earth!" Therefore, the Church must be as obedient to him today as it was during his pontificate! The Encyclical and Syllabus of Pope Pius IX. sufficiently show that he so understands it.

Between the close of the pontificate of Nicholas I. and the beginning of the tenth century, eight popes occupied the chair of Peter, as it is called, and were all faithful to the policy of Nicholas, in so far as they had the ability to be so. One of these, Boniface VI., called by Baronius "an infamous wretch," was poisoned by the agency of the Bishop of Anagnina, who became his successor, under the name of Stephen VII. (Cormenin, vol. i., p. 273.) This infallible pope caused the body of his infallible predecessor, Formosus, who had been pope from the year 891 to 896, to be exhumed from its burial-place, "to punish him for having usurped the supreme dignity to his detriment." He assembled a council of bishops, had the dead body "placed in the pontifical

seat, the tiara on its head, the pastoral baton in its hand, and clothed with the sacerdotal ornaments." He appointed an advocate to defend him, and propounded to the dead Formosus questions, which the advocate so answered as to amount to a confession of guilt by Formosus! Whereupon Pope Stephen VII. impiously pronounced sentence of excommunication and deposition against the insensible victim of his pontifical vengeance, struck him a blow which prostrated the dead body at his feet, stripped off its pontifical robes with his own hands, cut off three of its fingers, ordered the head to be cut off, and the body to be thrown into the Tiber! (Cormenin, vol. i., p. 274.)

All this was done in the name of religion, under the criminal pretense of obedience to the Gospel of Christ, which everywhere places love, charity, and benevolence as among the highest cardinal virtues. It is no wonder, then, that Baronius, the great Roman Catholic annalist, who defended the papacy in everything in which it was possible to do so, spoke thus of the condition of the Church at this time:

"Never had divisions, civil wars, the persecution of pagans, heretics, and schismatics caused it to suffer so much as the monsters who installed themselves on the throne of Christ by simony and murders. The Roman Church was transformed into a shameless courtesan, covered with silks and precious stones, which publicly prostituted itself for gold; the palace of the Lateran was become a disgraceful tavern, in which ecclesiastics of all nations disputed with harlots the price of infamy.

"Never did priests, *and especially popes*, commit so many *adulteries, rapes, incests, robberies, and murders*; and never was the ignorance of the clergy so great as during this deplorable period. Christ was then assuredly sleeping a profound sleep in the bottom of his vessel, while the winds buffeted it on all sides, and covered it with the waves of the sea. And, what was more unfortunate still, the disciples of the Lord slept more profoundly than he, and could not awaken him either by their cries or their clamors. Thus the tempest of abomination fastened itself on the Church, and offered to the inspection of men the most horrid spectacle! The canons of councils, the creed of the apostles, the faith of Nice, the old traditions, the sacred rites, were buried in the abyss of oblivion, and the most unbridled dissoluteness, ferocious despotism, and insatiable ambition usurped their place. Who could call legitimate pontiffs the intruders who seated themselves on the chair of the apostles, and what must have been the cardinals selected by such monsters?" (Cormenin, vol. i., p. 275.)

Such times as these were adapted to the practice of any kind of imposture and fraud which the popes and clergy considered necessary to strengthen the authority of the papacy. As an effective means of establishing a code of canon laws for the government of the Church, one Dionysius had previously compiled a body of decrees made by former popes. These went back no further than the pontificate of Siricius, in the year 385; (*Ibid.*, vol. i., p. 24; Milnan's "Latin Christianity," vol. iii., p. 191.) and had reference to matters of faith and the forms of church government. They gave no special impunity to crime, and were, in no very great degree, inconsistent with the principles prevailing in the apostolic times, except in so far as they recognized such pagan customs as were calculated to give popularity to the

public worship of Rome. But they were unsuited to these times, in that they did not furnish a sufficient shelter for the corruption and imperialism of the popes, and did not sufficiently lay the foundation for their claim of dominion over the world. Something more was necessary; and the means of supplying this were not wanting. It consisted of the *False Decretals*, which are now universally considered to have been bold and unblushing forgeries. Yet, forgeries as they were, they constitute the corner-stone of that enormous system of wrong and usurpation which has since been built up by the papacy, to revive which Pope Pius IX. has now put forth his Encyclical and Syllabus, and numerous encyclical letters. These forgeries are attributed to one Isadore Mercator, of Seville, in Spain; but their real authorship is not entirely free from doubt. It is known, however, that they were carried from Spain to Rome by the Bishop of Mayence about the times we have been reviewing; times which, as there is no difficulty in seeing, were admirably adapted to such imposture.

Dr Dorner thinks that recent investigations have shown that they originated between the years 847 and 853, which period is covered by the pontificate of Leo IV. and the time assigned to the alleged Popess Joan; ("History of Protestant Theology," by Dorner, vol. i., p. 30.) so short a time before the pontificate of Nicholas I. as to show that they constituted the authority upon which he based his extraordinary and impious assumptions of authority.

These pseudo-Isidorian decrees were designed as a compilation of the canons established as far back as the pontificate of Clement I., in the year 91, so as to fill up the gap between him and Siricius, who became pope in the year 385. During this period there were thirty-three popes, all of whom, except one, Liberius, have been made saints. We shall better understand the purpose and character of these decretals by going back to the times of their alleged origin.

The second century closed with the pontificate of Pope Victor I., who distinguished himself by having, with the celebrated Tertullian, adopted the heresy of the Montanists, (Cormenin, vol. i., p. 31.) and inaugurated the controversy in relation to the festival of Easter. The Asiatic Christians, following the custom established by the evangelists St. John and St. Philip, celebrated this festival, like the Jews, on the fortieth day after the first new moon of each year; and when Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna and a disciple of St. John, visited Rome about the year 167-168, and found that it was the custom there to wait until the Sunday after the fortieth day, he declined to adopt it, and it was agreed between him and Anicetus, who was then pope, that each Church, the Eastern and Western, should follow its own custom. Thus, up to this time, there was perfect equality between the Greek and Latin churches, each retaining its own independence of the other. But when Victor I. became pope, he was not disposed to let the affairs of the churches remain in this quiet and pacific condition—so admirably calculated to advance the cause and progress of Christianity. He was the first pope who employed the thunders of excommunication, which have since been used with such terrible effect upon both nations and individuals.

He excommunicated Theophilus for asserting that Christ was a mere human, and Praxeus for his attempt to abolish the distinction between the three persons

in the Trinity. For the latter purpose, he assembled at Rome a council—the first ever convened by a pope of his own authority—and this exercise of power caused him to conceive the idea of the superiority of the Church of Rome over all the other churches. And hence, in order to establish this superiority, he resolved upon forcing the Eastern Christians to adopt the custom of Rome in reference to Easter; and thus inaugurated a controversy which gave rise to subsequent usurpations, and, in the end, to the final separation of the Greek and Latin Christians. This effort to make a matter of so small importance a cause of quarrel was, at its inception, resisted by many of the bishops; and Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, censured the pope for it, in the name of the Church in France—then Gaul. He yielded to the pressure of these opinions, but not without having contributed toward laying the foundation for the subsequent claim of supremacy.

His immediate successor, Zephyrinus, who became pope in the year 202, has also been accused of favoring the Montanists; but this accusation is probably unjust, as, imitating Victor, he excommunicated them, including Tertullian. Tertullian was so much esteemed for his piety, and on account of the services he had rendered Christianity in his "Apology" and other works, especially that against the heresy of Marcion, that his excommunication excited general indignation. And, in order to escape the consequences of this act, Pope Zephyrinus was driven to assert the claim of superiority made by Victor, hoping thereby to pacify the Western priesthood by the prospect of their sharing with him the power and authority he hoped to secure by a triumph over the Eastern Christians. Under these two pontificates, therefore—from the year 194 to 221—ambition first began to creep into the Church at Rome, and to stimulate its popes to substitute motives of worldly grandeur and wealth for that simplicity which had distinguished the humble fishermen who had followed the Saviour during his earthly but divine ministrations.

And thus we see the reason why these False Decretals are carried back to the times previous to Pope Siricius, in order to show that these popes, who were the alleged authors of them, predicated their claim of superiority upon the doctrines they contained, and designed them as the means of elevating the popes into earthly monarchs, and the whole priesthood into a powerful and irresponsible hierarchy.

The efforts now making to revive and re-establish them in this country make it important that the people should understand what they contain, so as to know what is meant by the temporal power of the pope, and what is proposed in the place of our Protestant institutions. They are, also, an additional key for the interpretation of the Encyclical and Syllabus.

In the first epistle attributed to Pope Clement I. he is made to represent himself as having immediately succeeded the apostle Peter in the pontifical chair, whereas it is well understood, and now conceded, that Linus and Anacletus were both bishops of Rome before Clement. But it needed authority of this kind to establish the assumption that Peter was the first pope, and this forgery answered the purpose. Besides, it recognized the book called "The Itinerary, or Book of the Voyages of St. Peter," which is, undoubtedly, apocryphal.

There are four other epistles also attributed to Clement, all of which are manifest forgeries. In one he is made to speak of princes and other ecclesiastical officers of the Church, when, in the time of Clement, none such were known. In another he is represented as addressing an epistle to St. James, wherein he calls himself the successor of St. Peter, when James died before Peter. And Clement is made to approve the doctrines of the Nicolaitans, who taught, says Du Pin, "that women ought to be kept in common." (For a thorough exposition of all these forgeries see Du Pin's "Eccl. Hist.," vol. i., p. 173.)

In a pretended epistle by Pope Anacletus, he is represented as a defender of Clement, when he died before Clement was Bishop of Rome. But he is made to speak of having received many things by tradition, in order to substitute tradition for fact – a thing which it was impossible for Anacletus to do, because he lived in the times of the apostles, when no tradition was necessary. The special object of this epistle, however, was to establish, by Anacletus, the proposition "that appeals from secular judges ought to be determined before bishops;" that "the privileges and laws of the Church ought to be confirmed;" that there should be "appeals from ecclesiastical judgments to the Holy See;" that there were "primates and metropolitans" in the Church: whereas it is well known that none of these orders existed, and none of these things were ever talked of or debated, until after the death of Anacletus.

In another epistle by the same bishop, it is said that he "would neither have bishops to be accused nor judged "a claim of immunity still persevered in.

The epistles attributed to Popes Evaristus and Alexander I., who were the immediate successors of Clement, contain nothing of special importance, but are made up of extracts from authors who lived long after their time, and refer to matters which did not occur for more than a century after they were dead.

Pope Sixtus I. is made to call himself an archbishop—a word not then used—and to speak of "appeals to Rome," and "the grandeur of that Church," and of the requirement "that all bishops wait for the pope's decision, and are instructed by his letters"—which, says Du Pin, are "modes of speaking never used by the first bishops of Rome."

Pope Telesphorus is made to say "that the laity and clergy could not accuse one another in judgment." And two letters are ascribed to Pope Higinus, of no special import, but condemned by their containing quotations from the popes Leo I., Martin I., and Adrian I., who lived long after. There are also three letters from Pope Pius I., which are shown, in the same way, to be spurious.

Pope Anicetus speaks of archbishops, primates, and patriarchs—not instituted till long after—besides, says Du Pin, "many other things of the same nature." There are also two letters from Pope Soter, which are also manifestly spurious.

An epistle by Pope Eleutherus "treats of ecclesiastical judgments in favor of the Court of Rome." He is made to insist that "all causes relating to the Church ought to be determined there," which, says Du Pin, "is a practice

contrary to all antiquity." This epistle is shown to be a forgery by abundant proofs. It copies a text out of St. John, and attributes it to St. Paul. It also contains passages from the writings of Pope Leo I. (A.D. 440), Felix III. (A.D. 526), Adrian I. (A.D. 772), from councils which had not met, and from the Theodosian code, when Theodosius was not emperor until nearly two hundred years after the death of this pope.

In an epistle by Pope Victor I. he is made to confer upon himself the further title of "Archbishop of the *Universal Church*," and to speak of "appeals to Rome." Its falsity is shown by the fact that it is addressed to Theophilus of Alexandria, who did not live till nearly two hundred years after. There is also another letter of his, directed to Desiderius, Bishop of Vienna, when there was no bishop of that name in Vienna till near the close of the sixth century." (Du Pin, pp. 173–178.)

Pope Zephrynus is represented as addressing an encyclical epistle, *ex cathedra*, to the bishops of Sicily, wherein he claims "final" jurisdiction in all cases relating to the trial of bishops, as belonging to the "seat of the apostles," that is, Rome. He prescribes the rules which shall govern such trials, the chief of which is, that "an accused bishop" should not be condemned by "patriarchs and primates" until "they find that the person either confesses himself guilty, or is proved so by witnesses trustworthy and regularly examined, who shall not be fewer in number than were those disciples whom the Lord directed to be chosen for the help of the apostles, that is, seventy-two"—a number quite sufficient to prevent a conviction in any case. He then proceeds to declare, "Nor should anyone of superior rank be indicted or condemned on the accusation of inferiors," and that all cases should be appealed to Rome. He claims for the pope the divine authority to bind and loose on earth and in heaven, as conferred by Peter and by the apostolic canons and constitutions. (*)

* Du Pin shows, incontrovertibly, that these canons and constitutions attributed to the apostles are also spurious.—Du PIN's *Eccl. Hist.*, vol. i., pp. 13–16.

He then provides what was most needed for establishing the power of the hierarchy, and securing perfect impunity to them by covering up and concealing whatever crime a bishop may commit, in these words:

"For bishops are to be borne by the laity and clergy, and masters by servants, in order that, under the exercise of endurance, things temporal may be maintained, and things eternal hoped for." ("*Anti-Nicene Library*," vol. ix., p. 145, *Epistles of Pope Zephyrinus*.)

Another epistle of this same pope, to the bishops of Egypt, is only worthy of notice because of the claim of power it sets up for the "Apostolic Church" at Rome, and the assertion that Peter was "chief of the apostles." Both these epistles are shown to be forgeries, by the fact that they contain passages from Popes Leo I. (A.D. 440), Vigilius (A.D. 540), Gregory I. (A.D. 590), Martin I. (A.D. 649), Adrian I. (A.D. 772), and from the Theodosian code.

Pope Calistus is represented as also issuing encyclical letters upon sundry

subjects. In one he says: "Let no one take up an accusation against a doctor [teacher or priest], because it is not right for sons to find fault with fathers, nor for slaves to wound their masters." In another, to the bishops of Gaul, he says, "Those who conspire against bishops, or who take part with such," are guilty of a crime, and are condemned, "not only by the laws of the Church, but of the world." Defining the punishment prescribed for this offense, he is made to say it had been "ordained" by his "predecessors," that if the inferior clergy were guilty of it, they "should be deprived of the honor which they enjoy;" that those who did not belong to the clergy "should be cut off from communion, and expelled from the Church;" and "that all men of both orders should be infamous; and that, too, not only for those who did the deed, but for those also who took part with such." Assigning the reason for this extraordinary protection to the bishops, and severity to their accusers, he says: "For it is but equitable that those who despise the divine mandates, and prove themselves disobedient to the mandates of the fathers, should be chastised with severer penalties, in order that others may fear to do such things, and that all may rejoice in brotherly concord, and all take to themselves the example of severity and goodness."

Section II. is on "those who have intercourse with excommunicated persons, or with unbelievers." No one is to "have any intercourse with such in speech, or in eating or drinking, or in the salutation with the kiss, nor let him greet such; because, whosoever willingly holds intercourse with the excommunicated, in these or other prohibited matters, will subject himself, according to the ordinance of the apostles, to like excommunication. From these, therefore, let the clergy and laity keep themselves, if they would not have the same penalty to endure. Also, do not join with unbelievers, neither have any fellowship with them. They who do such things, indeed, are judged, not as believers, but as unbelievers."

Section III. treats of "those who ought not to be permitted to prefer an accusation, or to bear witness, etc.," and says: "Those, again, who are suspected in the matter of the right faith should by no means be permitted to prefer charges against priests and against those of whose faith there is no doubt; and such persons should be held of doubtful authority in matters of human testimony. Their voice, consequently, should be reckoned invalid whose faith is doubted, and no credit should be given to those who are ignorant of the right faith." Even as it regards one who is entitled to make an accusation against a bishop or priest, he must not do it, except in the presence of him whom he seeks to accuse. ("Anti-Nicene Christian Library," vol. ix., p. 203, Epistles of Pope Calistus.)

These epistles contain passages taken from the Council of Nice, and the fifth Council of Rome, which were held long after; and from the popes Gelasius (A.D. 492), Symmachus (A.D. 498), Gregory I. (A.D. 590), and Adrian I. (A.D. 772)—all showing their false and fraudulent character.

There is an epistle containing an *ex-cathedra* decree of Pope Urban I. addressed "to all Christians," wherein it is prescribed that, instead of the practice which prevailed among the early Christians of holding property in common, it should be "left in the hands of the bishops, who hold the place of the apostles;" that the bishops should have "elevated seats, set up and

prepared like a throne, 'to show' by these that the power of inspection and of judging, and the authority to loose and bind, are given to them by the Lord;" that the faithful should hold "no communication with those with whom they [the bishops] have none;" and that those "whom they have cast out" shall not be received. ("Anti-Nicene Library," vol. ix., p. 217, *Epistle of Pope Urban I.*)

The forgery of this epistle is shown by the fact that it contains thoughts and words from Eusebius, who was not born until nearly one hundred years after, from Pope Gregory IV. (A.D. 827), and from the Theodosian code.

Pope Pontianus had but little time for issuing decrees; for his entire pontificate lasted only a few months. For the suspicion of wishing to disturb the peace of the Roman empire, during the reign of Alexander Severus, he was banished to Siberia, where he remained till about the year 235– 237, when he was brought back, "and expired under the scourge." Eusebius makes his pontificate embrace five or six years, but there is great uncertainty about it. Nevertheless, epistles from him are placed among these palpable forgeries.

In the first, to Felix Subscribonius, "On the Honor to be bestowed on Priests," he is represented as saying: "And, again, they are not to be accused by the infamous or the wicked, or the hostile, or by members of another sect or religion. If they sin, they are to be arraigned by other priests; further, they are to be held in check by the chief pontiffs, and they are not to be arraigned or restrained by seculars or by men of evil life."

In his second epistle, "to all bishops," he is made to say: "Wherefore persons suspected, or hostile, or litigious, and those who are not of good conversation, or whose life is reprehensible, and those who do not teach the right faith, have been debarred from being either accusers or witnesses by our predecessors with apostolic authority; and we, too, remove them from that function, and exclude them from it in times to come, etc." (*Ibid.*, vol. ix., p. 232, Pope Pontianus.)

To show the forgery of these epistles, Du Pin says they "are made up of passages taken out of the vulgar Latin, St. Gregory, St. Jerome, Sixtus the Pythagorean: the rest is written in a barbarous style."

An epistle from Pope Anterus, "On the Transference of Bishops," was designed to prove, what no antecedent history shows, that Peter, as bishop, was transferred from Antioch to Rome. He says, "Peter, our holy master and the prince of the apostles, was translated for the sake of the common good from Antioch to Rome, in order that he might be in a position there of doing more service."

At another place he recognizes the obligation of the old Mosaic law, "that whoever has not given obedience to the priests should be stoned outside the camp by the people, or, with his neck beneath the sword, should expiate his presumption with his blood;" (Deuteronomy xviii., 12.) with the single qualification that "now, however, the disobedient is cut off by spiritual

chastisement, and, being cast out of the Church, is torn by the rabid mouth of demons." ("Anti-Nicene Library," vol. ix., p. 240, Pope Anterus.)

Du Pin establishes this forgery by showing that the author speaks of a Bishop of Ephesus named Felix, when there was none such, and of a Bishop of Alexandria named Eusebius, which was untrue. He also shows that he was contradicted by the three councils, of Antioch, Sardica, and Chalcedon; and that he quotes from popes and others who did not live until after that time.

There are epistles from Pope Fabian, or Fabianus, who, according to Eusebius, was indebted for his election to the presence of the Holy Ghost alighting upon his head in the form of a dove! This pope employed the power of excommunication against Privatus, a bishop, for heresy; and inaugurated the ceremony of prostration at the feet of the pope upon the occasion of his election. Therefore there seemed, doubtless, to be a fitness in attributing some of these forgeries to him. The first of his epistles is addressed "to all the ministers of the Church Catholic," and concerns "those who ought not to be admitted to clear themselves, and of the duty of having no fellowship with the excommunicated."

Assuming that "by the divine precepts and the apostolic institutes" the pope is required to watch over "all the churches," and exhorting the clergy to be "obedient and faithful children of the holy Church of God"—that is, of Rome—he says, "These men, and all else who do not teach the true doctrine, and hold not the true faith, cannot act as accusers of any true believer, because they are branded with infamy, and are cut off from the bosom of our holy mother, the Church, by the sword of the apostles, until their return to correct conversation and belief." And he is made to repeat the same idea in other forms, thus:

"All who come under suspicion with respect to the Catholic faith *cannot be admitted as accusers of those who hold the true creed;*" and thus: "And therefore are charges, which are preferred by those who are objects of suspicion in the matter of the true faith, rejected."

He is also represented as saying, "And if any one, setting aside the rules wittingly, sings with the excommunicated in his house, or speaks or prays in company with them, that man is to be deprived of the privilege of communion."

He is then made to originate and invent, what every reader of ecclesiastical history knows to be untrue, the statement that Peter ordained Clement as his successor in the pontificate, and "addressed the people" at his ordination; whereas Peter died about the year 65–67, and Clement's pontificate did not commence till the year 91, nearly thirty years after! The words he is said to have used are these:

"Whence, also, the blessed chief of the apostles, Peter, addressing the people at the ordination of Clement, says this, among other things;" making him say that no man should be "on terms of friendship" with any one who was hostile to Clement; and also: "If, however, any one is not friendly, and speaks with those with whom he [the chief] speaks not, such a one belongs to those who seek to exterminate the Church of God; and though he seems to be

with you in body, he is against you in mind and heart. And such a one is a much more dangerous enemy than those who are without, and who are openly hostile."

All this is as entirely opposed to the spirit of true Christianity, such as Peter taught in obedience to the precepts and example of his Divine master, as it is consistent with that stupendous system of papal power and fraud which these forgeries were designed to build up.

There is another epistle of this same pope, addressed "to all the bishops of the East." A portion of this has reference to the renewal of the chrism at the Lord's—supper every year; but it does not fail to lay down the same instruction, attributed by these forged Decretals to his predecessors. These words are put into his mouth:

"The apostles themselves and their successors decreed of old time that those persons should not be admitted to lay accusations who are under suspicion,... or who are doubtful in the matter of the true faith." Also: "Those have neither the right nor the power to accuse the priests or the clergy, who are incapable themselves of being made priests legitimately, and are not of their order," etc. And again: "The priests, too, whom the Lord has taken to himself from among all men, and has willed to be his own, are not to be dealt with lightly, nor injured, nor rashly accused or reprehended, save by their masters, seeing that the Lord has chosen to reserve their causes to himself, and ministers vengeance according to his own judgment.... For these are rather to be borne with by the faithful than made subjects of reproach, just as there is chaff with the wheat even in the last winnowing, and as there is bad fish with good even on their separation, which is yet to be on the shore—that is to say, at the end of the world. By no means, then, *can that man be condemned by a human examination* whom God has reserved for his own judgment, that the purpose of God, according to which he has decreed to save what had perished, may be unalterable." He is then made to declare that all who have sinned shall "go down into the pit," unless "*restored by sacerdotal authority*;" and to assign to the apostles the determination "that the accusing of priests should be a matter undertaken with difficulty, or never undertaken, that they ought not to be ruined or displaced by wicked men."

By the assumption that he, as pope, is equal to the apostles, he is made to declare that if any one of the clergy "proves an enemy to his bishops, and seeks to incriminate them," he shall be removed and given over to the *curiae*, or Court of the Inquisition at Rome, as its prisoner and slave for life, and "remain infamous without any hope of restoration;" and then this epistle proceeds,

"In like manner, we decree and ordain by apostolic authority that the flock should not dare to bring a charge against their pastor, to whose care they had been consigned, unless he falls into error in the faith; for the deeds of superiors are not to be smitten with the sword of the mouth; neither can the disciple be above the master," etc.

Again: "After the example of Ham, the son of Noah, they are condemned who bring the faults of their fathers into public view, or presume to accuse or

calumniate them, even as was the case with Ham, who did not cover the shame of his father Noah, but exhibited it for mockery. And in like manner those are justified by the example of Shem and Japhet, who reverently cover and seek not to display those matters in which they find that their fathers have erred."

Then the mode of procedure against a bishop for violating the faith is prescribed, when the epistle says, "For his other acts, however, he is rather to be borne with by his flock and those put under him, than accused or made the subject of public detraction," etc.

There is also a third epistle from this same pope, addressed "to Bishop Hilary," wherein he is represented as repeating his decree in favor of priestly impunity, in these words: "We decree and resolve that those who are not of good conversation, or whose life is impeachable, or whose faith and life and liberty are unknown, should not have the power of accusing the priests of the Lord." ("Anti-Nicene Library," vol. ix., p. 249, *Epistles of Pope Fabian*.)

Epistles are also inserted from other popes, to wit: Cornelius, Lucius, Stephen I., Sixtus II., Dionysius, Felix I., Eutychian, Caius, Marcellinus, Marcellus I., Eusebius, Sylvester, Marcus, Julius I., Liberius, and Damasus I., so as to bring the Decretals down to the time of Pope Siricius, in the year 385; and thus, with those compiled by Dionysius, to render the code of canon laws complete. The great ecclesiastical historian, Du Pin, says of them all, that they "are full of several passages taken out of the fathers, popes, and councils more modern than the very popes by whom they are pretended to be written; and in which many things are to be found that don't in the least agree with the history of those times, and were purposely said to favor the court of Rome, and establish her pretensions against the rights of bishops and the liberties of churches.

But it would take up too much time to show the gross falsity of these monuments that are now rejected by common consent, and even by those authors that are most favorable to the court of Rome, who are obliged to abandon the patronage of these epistles though they have done a great deal of service in establishing the greatness of the court of Rome, and ruining the ancient discipline of the Church, especially in relation to ecclesiastical decisions and rights of bishops." (Du Pin's "Eccl. Hist.," vol. i., p. 178.)

These liberal quotations from the False Decretals—otherwise scarcely excusable—are necessary to show how the popes and the Roman Catholic hierarchy have laid the foundation of their enormous power and prerogatives. The system they have built upon this foundation would have been bad enough if what has been put into the mouths of these popes had been actually uttered by them. But when it is considered that these things are the corrupt inventions of priests of the ninth century, and that this fact is known to all intelligent Roman Catholics, and frankly admitted by many of them, it almost staggers human credulity to suppose that there are now any in the world who are willing to risk their reputation for integrity and candor by attempting to maintain a system thus originated and upheld.

There is nothing else, among all the nations of earth, bearing any resemblance to it—no other system by which it has been so daringly and perseveringly proposed to erect within all the governments a foreign and antagonistic power, independent of all human law, and irresponsible to human authority. By means of it emperors, kings, princes, and peoples have been brought down in abject humiliation at the feet of innumerable popes, who, claiming to be in the place of God on earth, have lorded it over them with a severity which never abated and an ambition that could never be satisfied. It is marvelous to contemplate the origin and progress of such a structure of fraud and wrong, to observe the popular degradation which it wrought out, as the means of securing the triumph of the papacy, and to see the patience with which the world now tolerates the insolent ambition which demands its reconstruction in the name of God and humanity!

This language is not too harsh. The pretense set up in these false and forged decrees deserves condemnation in even harsher and severer terms. They were designed to secure to the priesthood the most perfect impunity, and to place them so far above the people as to put it out of the power of the latter even to complain at their oppressions. They allow a bishop or priest to commit any crime he pleases—murder, robbery, rape, or seduction—and deny his responsibility to the laws of the country where he resides, or to any other law but that which the pope may enact! They command the members of the Roman Catholic Church to regard these bishops and priests as their masters, and to conceal and cover up whatsoever crimes they may commit, rather than bring disgrace upon the Church! They pronounce as unworthy of belief all who are not members of that Church, so as to render the conviction of a bishop or priest impossible upon their testimony before the court of Rome, even for the most outrageous offenses! They, in fact, authorize and license whatsoever a bishop or priest shall do, although he may drag his clerical robes into the very filth and mire of profligacy, prostitution, and vice!

Continued in [Chapter XIII. The False Decretals](#)