

This country, it is said, was among the last to be brought under its yoke, but when once enthralled it sunk rapidly under its influence, and soon became more enslaved than other lands. Scotland, which had successfully resisted the Roman armies, and retained its national independence against the military skill and prowess of this last and strongest of the four universal monarchies, was at length overcome, and for many centuries kept under subjection, by "the man of sin."

The state of Scotland from the beginning to the middle of the sixteenth century (not to speak of centuries before,) was beyond measure deplorable. More than one-half of its wealth was in the hands of the corrupt clergy and ecclesiastics of the Church of Rome. The priesthood, not the monarchs, ruled the kingdom, directing all its civil and political movements. The nobles had become subservient to the arrogant leaders of Popery. The Bishops rivalled the Princes of royal blood in the splendour of their establishments, and preceded the nobility in honours. The clergy in general were illiterate and profane, given to all kinds of immorality and vice. The abuses they practised are too numerous, and some of them too gross to be mentioned. By their deceit and extortion, and the influence they acquired over the higher classes, they swelled the system of superstition, and multiplied monasteries, nunneries, and other nurseries of idleness and vice, till the whole land swarmed with monks, nuns, friars, and canons, of all the various orders which their distorted system of worship had invented. The people "sat in darkness, and in the region and shadow of death." The Bible was concealed from their view, and its use prohibited under heavy penalties. The religious services, if they may be so called, were "mumbled over in a dead language, which even many of the priests did not understand, and which some of them could scarcely read." (Dr. McCrie's life of John Knox.)

The doctrines of christianity were unknown. Of the worship of one God, and an approach to Him through the one Mediator, the people were entirely ignorant. More prayers were offered to the Virgin Mary, and other saints, than to the only object of religious worship, and the intercessions of saints and angels were more employed than the only acceptable and all prevalent intercessions of Jesus Christ. The bodies of the dying were besieged by covetous, designing, cunning, and wicked priests. Everything like free enquiry was suppressed, and wherever there appeared a disposition to acquire knowledge, or to examine into the priestcraft which prevailed, there was a danger of being subjected to imprisonment and death, or at least a necessity to escape into a foreign land.

Such was the state of civil and religious matters in Scotland, before the memorable Reformation, of the ultimate prevalence of which we have now the privilege of the Tri-centenary.

We proceed to notice some of the causes which led to this grand ecclesiastical revolution.

The abuses to which we have referred had become too ponderous to be upheld,—the system had outstretched its mark,—its centre of gravity was beyond its base. The impositions had become too numerous, and too enormous to deceive persons of any reflection, and influence. The truth of the system began to be suspected because it was too gross to be believed, and too tottering to be secure. There were some all along who suspected; or saw through, the impostures which were practised: there were some who secretly, yet accurately, pried into the prevailing superstitions, and who communicated their views to others in whom they could confide. Enquiries proceeded, light dawned, and although it was most hazardous to utter a