

The Colonial Protestant;

AND

JOURNAL OF LITERATURE & SCIENCE.

Vol. II.

FEBRUARY, 1849.

No. 2.

THE STUDY OF CHURCH HISTORY.

BY REV. ROBERT BURNS, D.D., TORONTO.

THE value of Church History may be estimated by reference to some of its legitimate objects. One of these is the establishment of the truth of the Gospel by arguments derived from its rapid progress and success; and Church History illustrates the nature and extent of that evidence, by reference to monuments of unquestionable relevancy. Another object is, the history of the fulfilment of prophecy; and in this relation, Church History ranges through the four great empires of antiquity; the life of the Great Redeemer himself; the dealings of God with his ancient people since the Christian era; and the rise, progress, and present state of the Eastern and Western Antichrists. A third object is, to furnish a map of the human mind and of the human character; and this Church History supplies by opening up the springs of action, and exhibiting man under varied and ever shifting influences. The philosopher of civil history will labour in vain if he overlooks entirely the influence of religious causes, which are the strongest of all; while the philosopher of ecclesiastical history will lose *his* mark if he limit his researches to the influence

of religious causes on *individual character* alone. God is the moral Governor of nations; and the student of Church History waits on His mighty movements, in His gradual subjugation of all things to the setting up of that kingdom which shall last forever.

The history of religious truth leads to the trial of its reality by its influence on morals. There is much to grieve every sensible and virtuous mind in the causes which have in all ages interfered to prevent the blessed influence of truth from being practically realized; and yet the researches of the historian into the nature and operation of these causes, are of great value. They show us the true nature and extent of that violent hatred to the truths of God, which in all ages has characterized fallen man. The early departure of men from the knowledge and worship of the true God; the varied forms and phases of incipient idolatry, with its wide-spreading influence afterwards, all over the east; the common origin which may be assigned to all the forms of paganism; the character and influence of that peculiar system which God was pleased to institute