

of diplomacy, to mind his own business. So alarming is the state of affairs, as viewed from the papal idea of the church, that a call has been issued for an ecumenical council to be held in 1869,—the first convoked since the one called to resist the Reformation,—to devise measures of resistance against the threatened speedy downfall of the papacy.”

This ecumenical council the writer regards, and not without reason, “as the wail of a falling power.” We are not sanguine enough to believe, with the author of “The Great Tribulation,” that we are in the very last hours of the 1260 years of the Papacy; but we are farther still from believing that it will ever again assert its sway, as it did in the dark ages, and drink itself “drunk with the blood of the saints.” There are too many Bibles in circulation for that!

With regard to what the writer calls, for want of a better term,

THE ARISTOCRATIC IDEA,

He says, “When the Reformation brought in a purer faith and practice, there came in naturally a better idea also of the church, though the reformers were not agreed respecting it. Many adopted an aristocratic idea,—one which places all ecclesiastical power, or government, neither in a visible head, as a pope, nor in the membership of the local congregations, but in a few men standing between these extremes. This idea develops into church courts of every grade, from a local session up to an ecumenical consistory, which courts claim and exercise all ecclesiastical authority and government. They govern the churches; they are themselves the churches,—while the membership are without authority altogether, or have none greater than the election of an aristocracy, which is not directly amenable to them. The real initial of power lies in the aristocracy, and not in the membership, which, perchance, may elect that aristocracy, or a part of it. This aristocracy, in its lowest form, lords it over particular congregations; and then builds up from itself, by its own action, the whole machinery of church government.”

This idea aspires, also, to a national, and even to an ecumenical, organic union of believers. Were any one of the many forms of polity which it has developed to become the polity of all believers, this idea would naturally, indeed inevitably, seek to show the brotherhood of the saints in the establishment of an ecumenical court, rising above assemblies and conferences in authority, and binding all national bodies into one organic whole. It fails, however, to accomplish its purpose to make the church organically one. This idea, in its many forms of polity, has been strong only to divide the household of faith into opposing organizations. Its boasted strength is brittleness; for each organization founded on it snaps asunder at every strain. The attempted reunion, in this country and in Europe, of the broken fragments, raises doubts in earnest minds respecting the origin, value, and permanency of that idea of the church which develops itself into forms of government so easily and often broken in pieces, and needing mending so frequently.

The Church of England, through the ambition of a king to substitute himself and his successors for the pope as visible head of the church, is a combination of the monarchic and the aristocratic ideas; for, were this mixed idea to be generally adopted, there would be as many heads of the church as there are civil rulers. Out of England, the idea which underlies the Anglican Church is, however, more simple. It is that of a priestly aristocracy, ruling by virtue of Apostolic succession. This church organization, like the Romish, is not easily rent asunder; for its hoops of policy are strong. But it has expelled Puritan and Methodist, and thus divided the body of Christ; and there are influences at work in it at the present time, both in England and in America, which must soon divide it into two parties,—one with mass and candle going over to “the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth;” the other, shocked at the blasphemous pretensions and ceremonies of “that Wicked,” coming out into a juster apprehension of the idea of the church, and into a polity of greater liberty.