

trine: and the blessings to which they referred were painfully and diligently sought, and joyfully found and experienced; and this was the main feature of personal religion. The Apostles preached, and their hearers exercised, repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ; their sins were forgiven them for Christ's sake; and because the Holy Spirit, as Comforter and Sanctifier, dwelt within them, they were the habitation, the temple of God.

The commencement of the corruption which seems to have attained its height in the fourteenth century, may be seen in the very days of the Apostles. The Epistles to the Corinthians and the Galatians, and those of Peter, James, and John, show that the mystery of iniquity began to work very early. Men found it an easier task to place religion chiefly in the form of godliness. The power of godliness appears first to have been made subordinate, then to have become rather valuable than essential,—the mark of eminence, rather than the test of safety; and so the declining process went on till the power was denied, and the form became all in all. And when the declension had arrived at this stage, moral corruption became fearfully apparent. It is the vitality of religion, not its external forms and restraints, that alone can counteract the agencies of inward depravity, and outward temptation.

Some of the principal facts connected with this spiritual declension and moral corruption, it will be necessary to select, and briefly to describe.

The Clergy had long ceased to be a spiritual body. They entered upon the sacred profession without being called of God, and were constituted Ministers merely by the appointment of man. Three causes (among others) appear to have contributed very largely to the terrible corruption of the clerical order.

First,—The enormous wealth which its members possessed, and which it possessed as in its own right, without any power of interference and control from the people whom they were bound to serve.—Second, Their rigorously-enforced celibacy, which in the age immediately preceding the Reformation, had produced its natural effects, in an extreme and almost shameless dissoluteness of morals. Third,—their complete insulation from the people, and almost total (though by no means uncontested) independence of the secular power. A clergyman was held to be subject to his spiritual superior alone; while civil causes, under various pretexts, were drawn to the spiritual courts; so that the King, as head of the state, was neither supreme over all persons, nor in all causes.

These, however, were but subordinate causes of evil, in comparison with the enormous usurpation by which the Roman Bishop claimed supremacy over the universal church. As Bishop of the metropolitan see, he would very early possess considerable influence; and when external rank began to be valued by the Ministers of Christ, a primacy of order seems to have been conceded to him. Step by step