

The Catholic.

Quod semper; quod ubique; quod ab omnibus.

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Twelve Lectures on the subject of the Prophecies relating to the Christian Church: being a Portion of the Lectures founded at Lincoln's Inn Chapel, of the late Bishop Warburton, by EDWARD PEARSON D. D. Master of Sidney College, Cambridge, and Christian Advocate to that University. 1811.

During the last three centuries, the investigation of certain mysterious prophecies of Daniel, St. Paul, and the Evangelist St. John, has been a favourite and fashionable pursuit among the enemies of the Catholic Church. Neither ought this to be a matter of surprise, if we consider that their imaginary discoveries in this Terra incognita of Theology, while they gratified the curiosity and excited the enthusiasm of their disciples, at the same time supplied their malignity with an abundant source of popular declamation against the Parent Church. In the whole circle of literature, there is not, perhaps, one subject, on which the perverted industry and ingenuity of Protestant divines have produced more volumes of contemptible rubbish; or on which they have given more striking instances of anile credulity and senseless superstition. At all times, it is true, there have been and are, many individuals among them, who have condemned these extravagancies, and have admitted the justness of Dr. South's remark on the subject of Protestant expositors: that "The interpretation of the Apocalypse either finds a man mad, or makes him so." The history of Protestant interpretations of the dark and mysterious passages of the holy scriptures to which we allude: their successive application of them to the passing events of the day; their bold confidence in predicting from them future events, which were always belied by time, would afford a subject of interesting investigation. It would furnish the philosopher with some curious instances of the aberrations of the human mind: it would shew the Catholic to what an excess of folly, and even of impiety, a licentious interpretation of holy writ is apt to lead men, who having lost the anchor of Catholic faith, are tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine; by the cunning of men lying in wait to deceive; and it would teach the Protestants to be more modest in reproaching the Catholic with either credulity or superstition. *Semper ego auditor tantum, nunquam ne reponam? Vexatus toties?* Except in a frown from Bishop Milner, and a smile from Dr. Lingard, (Let. to a Preb. II. Lingard's Tracts, p. 206) this subject has scarcely excited the notice of any modern Catholic convertist. We shall, therefore, make no apology for prefacing our remarks on Dr. Pearson's performance, with some

observations on the origin, the progress, and decline of this singular controversy.

Luther, in one of his coarse invectives against the Pope, after bestowing on the head of the Church all the terms of vulgar abuse, an art in which he stood unrivaled, terminated the disgusting climax by styling Rome *Babylon*, the Pope the *Man of sin*, and Antichrist. He probably hit upon these appellations at first accidentally, and employed them only in metaphor or jest. But finding that his lucky conceit was received with avidity by his adherents, and observing the politic use which he might derive from the pious fraud, in the dissemination of his new opinions, he moulded it without scruple into more shape and substance, and made it the watchword of his party. Smiling, we may well suppose, at the simplicity of those that believed him, he boldly asserted: *Papa ille est Antichristus, cum sit specialis procurator diaboli*:—The Pope is Antichrist, because he is the Devil's special steward. It is but justice to state, that Luther levelled his engines against the fanciful antichrist of his own creation from the Apostolic Epistles, not from the Apocalypse. Of this canonical and sacred, but much insulted book, he speaks, in the Preface to his German Bible, with the characteristic rashness of an innovating reformer. "My spirit," says he, "can make nothing out of this book. I hold it to be neither apostolical nor prophetic." Bishop Hurd made an ineffectual attempt to fix the origin of this vulgar cry a century earlier, and quoted Petrarch to this effect; but his overweening zeal was checked by his Patron Warburton, who in one of his letters, subsequently published, proved that Dr. Hurd had mistaken the sense of his author. But though the honour of this precious invention belongs to Luther, a host of followers and rivals were soon ambitious of a share in its propagation. Calvin, Beza, Peter Martyr, Bucer, and others, though differing widely as to the grounds of their opinion, were political enough to concur in the general conclusion that the Pope is Antichrist. Some of them found; or pretended to find, a strong confirmation of their new heresy, in the Epistles of St. John and St. Paul; others, despising this imagination, saw clearer indications in the two horns of the beast in Daniel: while the greater number, in defiance of the authority of Luther, persisted in extorting their darling fable from the tortured pages of the Apocalypse. Encouraged by this gratifying but discordant concurrence, Luther proceeded to greater lengths, and in the year 1537 inserted the new dogma in the Smalcalde Confession as an article of faith. Dr. Woodhouse has frankly observed in his dull and heavy commentary on the Apoca-

lypse, (p. 459) that the reformers must have derived great encouragement from this head. Indeed, the popular cry of the enthusiasts, "The Pope is Antichrist," contributed no less to the success of Luther's revolutionary designs, than the cry of *malignant*, or *aristocrat*, has since done to those of Cromwell or Robespierre. It was supposed to justify every excess, and to sanctify every crime.

The sober friends of religion, whether Catholics or Protestants, lamented these excesses of misguided or hypocritical zeal, and justly condemned the irreligious farce, as an impious profanation of holy writ. Even the saturnine coldness of Melancthon was startled at the impudent imposture; and on that account he refused to subscribe the Smalcalde Confession of Faith. No matter. The outcry was raised by his bolder associates: enthusiasm was enkindled, and the delusion gained ground. If Melancthon, and the more moderate men of his party, who wished to retain the Pope's Supremacy, if not as an apostolical tradition, at least as the bond of unity of faith, and the necessary and only means of preventing schism, and deciding religious controversies, had scruples on the subject: if Erasmus and the Catholics either ridiculed the folly, or detested the profaneness of this hoax of the pseudo-reformers, it was embraced with transport, and propagated with zeal, by a multitude, whose consciences were less penetrable to religious scruples or whose minds could more intrepidly defy the dictates of common sense. The mania was spread among the disciples of the reformation in Germany, Switzerland, France, Holland, and England; and waxing or waning, has been artfully kept up, with different degrees of intensity, to this day. Through the microscope of religious phrensy, the German Protestant, in the passages of scripture already mentioned, very clearly discovered the German empire; the French Huguenot as clearly descried France: the Dutchman, the United Provinces: while the distorted optics of the Englishman, with no less certainty, read the fortune and adventures of the insular Church of England: but all this motley crowd of bigots, though differing in almost every thing else, agreed in one point; that through the delusive medium, they could perceive the Papal scarecrow invested with every mark and feature of Antichrist. It would fatigue the patience and disgust the good sense of our readers, to dwell upon the synods of Foreign Protestants, who with those of Gap and Rochelle, declared this to be a *fundamental article of the Reformed Faith*; and however inconsistent with truth and reason, the ground of their separation from the Catholic Church: and still more to expose the typhus reveries of their di-