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## THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY ON CIVILIZATION.

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### IX.

We have already shown that the subversion of Rome was encouraged by the policy of the Christian Church. That the condition of affairs would have been creditable to the ecclesiastical system had Rome never been conquered by the barbarians, there is no reason to believe. Hallam thinks we may form some notion of how little probability there was of the Western Empire producing any excellent fruits, even if that revolution had never occurred, by considering what took place in Greece in the following ages, when "no original writer of any merit arose, and learning, though plunged for but a short period into mere darkness, may be said to have languished in a middle region of twilight for the greater part of a thousand years."

In the Western Empire, during a period of seven hundred years from the invasion of the barbarians, the Church exercised absolute and complete control; and then, after the dissolution of the whole frame-work of Roman society, "she was left," as Lecky observes, "with a virgin soil to realize her ideal of human excellence."

What was the intellectual condition of those over whom she swayed her sceptre? For many centuries, we are told, a layman could rarely be found capable of signing his name; charters were subscribed with the mark of the cross; what little learning existed was confined chiefly to the clergy. A "cloud of ignorance overspread the whole face of the Church, hardly broken by a few glimmering lights, who owe almost the whole of their distinction to the surrounding darkness" ("Middle Ages," 160).

In the sixth century the classics were scarcely read, and from the middle of this century to the eleventh, but little difference was discernible. "France reached her lowest point," says Hallam, "at the beginning of the eighth century, but England was, at that time, more respectable, and did not fall into complete degradation until the middle of the ninth. There could be nothing more deplorable than the state of Italy during the succeeding century. In almost every council the ignorance of the clergy forms a subject for reproach. It is asserted by one held in 992 that scarcely a single person was to be found, in Rome itself, who knew