

has preserved a very circumstantial account of the whole transaction.

The festival of Easter had, by the oriental churches, been uniformly celebrated on the *fourteenth day of the first moon*, by the occidental, on the *Sunday following that day*. In a matter so unimportant, the forbearance shown by his predecessors, who, even in Rome, had allowed the Quartodecimans to hold the feast on the fourteenth day, did not influence the conduct of Victor. This prelate, on the contrary, threatened with singular presumption, to cut off from his communion, all who should not conform, in the disputed particular to the practice of the Western churches. This arrogance of the pontiff excited the indignation of the bishops, who were thus required to relinquish a custom transmitted from the time of the Apostles. Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus, in particular, who is commended, in the highest terms, by Eusebius and Jerome, opposed the demand of Victor, and in a spirited letter to that prelate, refused to renounce or alter the practice of his church. Having been answered by a threat of excommunication, Polycrates assembled in a council, all the bishops of Asia Minor, who unanimously resolved to adhere to the ancient time of celebrating the festival. Informed of his resolution, the pontiff executed his previous threat; and sent letters containing information of the same, both to those bishops against whom he acted, and to those who agreed with himself in the disputed particular, and whose approbation and support he was anxious to obtain. Instead of complying with his request, these latter "sharply rebuked" (such is the language of Eusebius) the imprudent violence with which the pope had proceeded, and, without paying the least regard either to his example or his demand, they continued to communicate with their brethren in the east. Though, therefore, it be admitted, that Victor *excommunicated* the Asiatic churches, the only meaning which can attach to the word, as applied to him is, that *he cut himself off from their communion*; for, instead of compelling all other bishops to act in a similar manner—which, being the acknowledged head of the church he would have done—it does not appear that a *single prelate* followed his example; but, on the contrary, they reprobated his conduct in terms, proper perhaps, to an equal, but which no person would address to one whom he considered the "infallible head of the church," or "Christ's vicar on earth."

76. A declaration made by the Roman clergy themselves, in the year 250, is important to be noticed, as it clearly indicates the opinion then held, as to the authority of their bishop. Subsequent to the martyrdom of Fabianus, A. D. 250, and previous to the election of a successor, a correspondence was carried on between the Roman presbyters, and deacons on the one side, and Cyprian, bishop of Carthage and his clergy on the other, "*de lapsis*," regarding the treatment of the "*lapsed*." To the inquiries of the Africans, the Roman presbyters, &c., return the following as their opinion, "That such of the *lapsed* as were at the point of death should, upon an unfeigned repentance, be admitted to the communion of the church: but that the case of others should be delayed till the election of a new bishop, when, *together with him and with other bishops*, with the presbyters, deacons, confessors, and laymen, who had stood firm, they should take their case into consideration," assigning as the reason why they gave this advice, that, "*a crime committed by many, ought not to be judged by one, and that a decree could not be binding without the consent and approbation of many.*"†

77. But though, at this period, any such doctrine as the popes' supremacy, much less their infallibility, was unknown in the church, yet the influence possessed by the pontiffs, appears, even at this time, to have been considerable, though not greater than that which learning and piety conferred upon other prelates. This may be illustrated by the following example.

During the pontificate of Stephen, (A. D. 253-257,) two Spanish bishops, Basilides and Martiel, had, for various crimes, been deposed by their brethren, who had substituted, in room of the former, others, in their opinion, more worthy of the episcopal office. On an application to Rome by one of the deposed bishops—for that both applied is not expressly stated by Cyprian—he was admitted to the communion of the pontiff; whose countenance thus publicly granted, had the effect of restoring him to the exercise of his episcopal functions. This fact, we readily concede, shows that *very considerable authority* must, from whatever cause, have been possessed by the Roman see, in the days of Stephen; but the concluding part of this same transaction, incontrovertably disproves its supremacy.

The churches over which the obnoxious bishops had, by the Roman influence, been replaced, speedily applied to the African bishops. A Carthaginian council, in which the famous Cyprian presided, *declared against* Basilides and Martiel, and in favour of Felix and Sabinus, who had succeeded the former on their first degradation. This sentence was carried into effect, no regard being had to the papal opposition.

78. From this transaction, it is surprising to learn the advocates of the doctrine have endeavoured to draw an argument for the pope's supremacy. It certainly requires no great penetration to perceive, that if it prove the supremacy of the *Roman bishops* in the third century, it much more proves, that of *Cyprian* and the twenty-eight prelates that voted with him. For not only did the Spanish churches—to use the favourite term of the writers in question—*appeal* to the Africans from the sentence of the pope, thus ascribing to the former a superiority; but the decision of the council held at Carthage was *final*, having been carried into execution without regard to that of the pontiff.

79. The famous controversy regarding the baptism of heretics, which agitated the church during the pontificate of the same Stephen, and almost immediately subsequent to the dispute last noticed, while it shows that the ecclesiastical authority, as yet vested in the Roman pontiff was comparatively small, indicates at the same time, the existence of the ambitious and domineering spirit which, ever since the days of Stephen, has disgraced the papal throne, and to which are to be ascribed the various unwarrantable expedients it has at various times adopted: its impositions, its cruelty, and its usurpations.

80. The controversy to which allusion has been made, had arisen some time before the period at which we are now arrived, for it formed the subject of discussion in a council held at Iconium in Phrygia, A. D. 230. The dispute was revived by eighteen bishops of Numidia, who consulted a council, held by Cyprian, "*whether or not they should persevere in the custom of baptizing heretics, which had hitherto prevailed among them.*" The question was answered in the affirmative; and to others who requested instruction on the same point, a similar an-

† Cyprian, Ep. xxxi. A letter extremely important as relating to this question, and very decisive, especially the passage beginning "*Quoniam Notis differendæ.*" Bower. Hist. Pop. V. i. p. 60.

\* It is perhaps unnecessary to remark, that the title "*Papa*," was common to all bishops, till by a decree of Gregory VII. it was restricted to those of Rome.