

thorities, the liberality of many noble and wealthy converts had enriched the Roman church, its ministers, and particularly its bishops, to an extent which indicates the zeal, rather than the prudence of the donors, and excited as has been said, (54,) the cupidity of the heathen emperors.

Even previous to the events of the fourth century, the splendour and opulence of the church over which he presided, and the importance naturally attached to the capital, had, it cannot be denied, given to the Roman bishop a weight and authority, superior to those possessed by any other prelate.

The arrangements of Constantine, whose policy it was to introduce a perfect conformity between church and state, confirmed what prejudice had begun.

69. The absence of patriarchs united the western churches under the Pope, as their head: in the contests in which they were engaged with the eastern Christians, they regarded his triumph as their own; and never reflected, that the power which they so readily conceded to the pontiffs, might be employed for their own degradation.

70. The superiority of the Papal see, which superiority had, during many ages, been accounted for and justified, by "the importance of the city," "the decrees of councils," and "the imperial rescripts," was, by the ingenuous ambition of succeeding pontiffs, founded upon the authority of our Lord and his Apostles; while donations of territory which no sophistry could deduce from the words of the New Testament, were supported by the evidence of forged documents.

The aggrandizement of their see became in time the supreme object of anxiety to the Roman bishops; in comparison of this, all other considerations and all other interests were unsparingly sacrificed.

These are a few of the topics which will demand our attention during the remainder of these papers.

The discussions connected with the pretended establishment of Peter, as bishop of Rome, upon which so much stress has been laid by the supporters of the hierarchy, will be more naturally introduced afterwards; at present we would advert to the authority possessed by the bishops of Rome, during and subsequent to the Apostolic age.

71. Of all the writings ascribed to Clement, the friend and associate of the Apostles, the only one of undoubted genuineness is his "first Epistle to the Corinthians." This person had the best possible opportunities of obtaining correct information, concerning the nature and extent of that authority, to which, by his situation as bishop of Rome, he was entitled. If, as is affirmed, to Peter was committed an absolute dominion over the faith and practice of Christians; and if Clement succeeded both to the station and power of that eminent Apostle, he must have been fully aware of these circumstances; and this consciousness of his superiority must have distinctly appeared in his writings. In the Epistle, however, to which allusion has been made, not only is there a total absence of any claim to infallibility, but its whole style and manner demonstrate, that the writer conceived himself possessed of no authority whatever, over the persons to whom he wrote. The occasion, it may be added, which produced the letter in question—being a schism—afforded a proper opportunity for the display of the absolute power pretended to have been bequeathed by Peter to his successors. Instead of commanding the Corinthians, Clement is content with exhortation and entreaty; instead of urging the authority of the Roman see, he pleads that of our Lord and his Apostles; instead, finally, of dictating as a despot, he persuades as a brother and an equal. Of this conduct, indeed, an example had been set him by that

very Apostle whose lordship in the church has been so violently maintained. "The elders," says he, "I exhort, who am a fellow-elder."

72. That the prerogative afterward claimed by the Popes, of "deciding upon doctrine," or, of "declaring what is heresy," was unknown long after the age of Clement, may be evinced, as from innumerable other examples, so particularly from the fact, that toward the conclusion of the second century, the synods of Asia examined and condemned the tenets of Montanus, without so much as acquainting the Roman bishop; nor, which ought to be remarked, did their conduct excite any observation, either on the part of the apostolic see, or of the early writers by whom it is mentioned. Hence, we may fairly infer, that the condemnation of heretics by provincial synods, without the concurrence, or even the privy of the popes, was, at the period in question, deemed neither extraordinary nor improper; and that the papal claim of "deciding upon heresy," was neither acknowledged nor known. These conclusions are supported by such a host of other evidence, that no person, it is conceived, who brings to the investigation the least candour, can form an opposite opinion.

73. The papal infallibility, it need scarcely be added, was the discovery of future and darker ages; nor have the professed advocates of the doctrine pretended to show that it was held by any of the early Christians. Instead of proving the existence of such an opinion, it is the artful practice of Baronius and Bellarmine, the most strenuous and learned maintainers of the papal infallibility, to adduce arguments, however inconclusive, intended to establish the truth of the doctrine. The difficulties, indeed, attending the latter of these attempts, may well excuse their anxiety to free themselves from the incumbrance of the former. The assertion now made, receives abundant confirmation from the defence of their favourite dogma, urged by the writer mentioned above, in the case, of Victor, who was chosen to the see of Rome, A. D. 192. This prelate owned and approved the prophetic spirit of Montanus and his prophetesses, all of whom preceding pontiffs had condemned as heretics. The error of Victor is admitted by Baronius and Bellarmine, who, though they concede "the particular fact," maintain at the same time, his general inerrability! Suppose this contradiction reconciled, in other words, suppose both the positive and the negative of the same proposition to be true, it will not follow as a consequence, that any such doctrine as that supposed, was either known to the church in the days of Victor, or was received by it.

74. But the ignorance of the early Christians, concerning the supremacy and infallibility of the Roman bishops, appears conclusive against the existence of these supposed attributes, which, had they been taught by the Apostles, could not have been unknown to the early fathers; and being known, must have been either mentioned or alluded to by these men in their writings. This negative evidence against the papal infallibility and supremacy is corroborated by the practice of the early Christians, which was totally inconsistent with the supposition of their entertaining any such doctrine.

75. During the pontificate (we use these terms by anticipation) of the same Victor, an incident occurred, which clearly indicates the degree of authority possessed, at the end of the second century, by the Roman bishops. The following statement of the case, contains the substance of that given by Eusebius,† who

\* 1 Pet. v. 1.

† Baron. Annal. 173, et Bellarm. de sum Pontiff. l. 4.

‡ Eccles. Hist. l. v. cap. 23, et following chapter.