

pid veneration for unknown saints, to the worship of the Supreme Being. Miracles dazzled the eyes of men, and diverted them from attending to natural causes. They were taught to believe that prayers and offerings would atone for the most heinous crimes. Every sentiment of reason was perverted, and every principle of morality corrupted.

Those who had been at least the promoters of this confusion, knew how to avail themselves of it. The priests obtained that respect which was denied to kings; and their persons became sacred. The magistrate had no inspection over their conduct, and they even evaded the watchfulness of the civil law. Their tribunal eluded and even superseded all others. They found means to introduce religion into every question of law, and into all state affairs, and made themselves umpires or judges in every cause. When faith spoke, every one listened, in silent attention, to its inexplicable oracles. Such was the infatuation of those dark ages, that the scandalous excesses of the clergy did not weaken their authority.

This was owing to its being already founded on great riches. As soon as the priests had taught that religion depended principally upon sacrifices, and required first of all that of fortune and earthly possessions, the nobility, who were sole proprietors of all estates,

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