

a most important period in the world's history. It was the age of Constantine the Great, Julian the Apostate, the great Theodosius, and the terrible Alaric the Goth. The controversy between the followers of Athanasius and Arius rent the christian church; and rival factions shed each other's blood, in fierce contests regarding the mysterious nature of the Godhead. It was the age when two of the great founders of Latin Christianity arose and flourished—Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, and Augustine of Hippo in Africa—the latter destined to exert, by his writings, an influence over the whole of Christendom greater than that of any other man since the days of the Apostles. The barbarians of the north—sagacious of their quarry, from afar—were swooping down, like eagles to the carcase, on the corrupt, disorganized Roman Empire; and in little more than half a century, Rome, that cruel, rapacious power, before which the world had trembled for ages, perished, “deep in ruin as in guilt.” But one star of hope remained for the ruined world—Christianity, the religion of love,—destined to survive all the horrors and disorders of the times, and to erect on the ruins of Pagan Rome, the fair and stately structure of a christian civilization.

It was during this eventful period that Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, flourished, whose name occupies a most important place in the history of the Church. In him the sacerdotal character assumed a dignity and importance unknown before, confronting the throne, and even exercising a spiritual dictatorship over the supreme magistrate. At this time, each bishop was supreme in his own diocese. So far from assuming universal dominion over the whole world, the bishop of Rome was comparatively without authority; while the bishop of Milan is a far more prominent and commanding figure. Ambrose was, indeed, the spiritual ancestor of the Hildebrands and the Innocents, and first developed that papal power and imperiousness which afterwards attained such startling dimensions in a long line of Popes. With all his faults, he was distinguished

for his wise and courageous benevolence, and his generous, unselfish devotion to the great interests of humanity. Who does not applaud his moral courage as he stood forth the champion and vindicator of outraged humanity, and, culling before the tribunal of justice the mighty Theodosius, the master of the world, for the inhuman massacre at Thessalonica, compelled him to beg for absolution at his hands, the great Emperor prostrate on the earth, beating his breast and watering the ground with his tears. But it is only as a hymn writer that we have to do with Ambrose. To him are attributed some of the noblest of the Latin hymns with which, for ages, cathedral and monastery resounded, and which helped to keep alive, in many a heart, the flame of devotion, during the darkness and wretchedness of the middle ages. He imparted to the ceremonial of the church a solemnity and magnificence previously unknown; cultivated music with the utmost care, and introduced the antiphonal chanting and singing, in which the different sides of the choir answered to each other in responsive verses. So beautiful was the music in the Ambrosian chant, that Augustine tells us in his “Confessions,” his sensitive conscience took alarm, lest when he wept at the solemn music, he should be yielding to the luxury of sweet sounds, rather than imbibing the devotional spirit of the hymn. This chant which so ravished the ears of young Augustine with its simple and masculine tones, is still preserved in the church of Milan, and also in its main features, in the cathedral chanting of England; while in the Roman Catholic services it has been discarded for the more complicated Gregorian chanting.

There can be little doubt that it is to Ambrose the Christian world is indebted for that grand old hymn usually named “The Te Deum,” which has wafted to heaven the praises of men, generation after generation, since its words were first heard, fourteen hundred years ago, in the Cathedral of Milan. Of it a beautiful writer says, “it is at once a hymn, a creed and a prayer; or rather it is a creed taking wing and soaring heavenward; it is faith seized