

The presidency in the provincial synods, conferred at first by choice, afterward confirmed by custom, was speedily claimed by the metropolitans as their peculiar right, the concession of which claim exalted them to a permanent superiority over those whom, hitherto, they had considered their equals.

36. The synods, by means of which the metropolitans had succeeded in raising themselves above the level of their order, served, also, as was before hinted, to increase the authority of the clergy generally, in the government of the church. Whether, as Sarpis supposes, the demands made upon the time of laymen, proved the cause of their absenting themselves from the councils, (they being held twice every year,) or whether, as is more probably conjectured by Campbell, the number of churches which sent representatives, rendered it imperative that each should send few; or whether, finally, both of these causes concurred, certain it is, that the influence which the clergy, or rather the bishops, possessed in the councils, continued gradually to increase, and that of the laity consequently to diminish, till the latter were finally extinguished: and then, as the clergy with their bishops composed a *Diocesan*, so the bishops with their metropolitan composed a provincial synod.

37. It had been the policy of Constantine, to whom many of the changes which happened during his reign, in ecclesiastical matters, are ascribed, to conform, as much as possible, the government of the church to that of the state. In the latter, for reasons which need not be detailed in this place, he had created certain *præfects*, among whom in subordination to himself, the provinces of the empire were distributed. The practice of associating which had been confined to churches within the same province, was soon extended to all those within the same *præfectum*. The bishops of those cities in which the *præfects* resided, and who, by the introduction of provincial synods, had already attained the rank of metropolitans, presided as a matter of course, in these more extended councils. Hence they also, by a process, which we have had occasion more than once to notice, obtained a decided and permanent superiority over the metropolitans.

38. The *patriarchs*—so the new dignitaries were called—were four in number, having their residences in three of the principal cities of the empire, namely, Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch: Jerusalem, the fourth, was probably selected rather in consideration of the events of which it had been the theatre, than of its importance as a city. To those already mentioned, the patriarch of Constantinople was afterwards added, when the seat of empire was transferred thither from the ancient capital. Another order of prelates, superior to metropolitans, inferior to patriarchs, were called *exarchs*, in imitation of certain civil governors, with whom, in ecclesiastical affairs, they had an equal jurisdiction.

39. At the head of the church were the patriarchs, from whom, except in certain cases to the emperor, there was no appeal. The next in dignity—for their authority within their own district seems to have been equal to that of the patriarchs within theirs, were the *exarchs*. The metropolitans succeeded. They were followed by the bishops, and the presbyters terminated the series. To this gradation there were a considerable number of exceptions, which, however, our present subject does not require that we should specify.

By the steps now described, five individuals were raised to preside over the whole Christian world; with duties devolving upon each, more, perhaps, than one person could well discharge, and with powers sufficient, we might think, to gratify even the grasping ambition by which churchmen began to be disgraced. But the thirst of power, like that of gold, gains strength with

every fresh gratification; and the contentions in which the patriarchs engaged for superiority, supply some of the most unseemly passages in ecclesiastical history.

40. The distinctions which had now been introduced among the clergy, and the rank and consequence to which this body had attained, are to be ascribed, in conjunction with the causes just enumerated, chiefly to their wealth and ambition, favoured by the ignorance of the people: it may, however, be both curious and useful to inquire *under what pretences* their ambitious designs were attempted to be concealed or justified.

The Jews, as being the people whom the Almighty chose "to put his name among them," are frequently styled in the Old Testament "God's peculiar people," "the lot of His inheritance," "His peculiar treasure." That these designations were intended of the *whole Israelitish community*, and not restricted to any portion of it, whether Priests or Levites, is so manifest to every reader of the Old Testament, that to prove it were altogether superfluous. Nor, in fact, have those whom it concerns most to do so, pretended to find any such restriction of the terms in the Jewish scriptures. "God," it is the ætæmic remark of Campbell, is, indeed, in the Old Testament, said to be the *inheritance of the Levites*; a determined share of the sacrifices and offerings made to God, was, in part, to serve them instead of an estate in land, such as was given to each of the other tribes. But mark the difference: no where is the tribe of Levi called *God's inheritance*, though this expression is repeatedly used of the whole nation.\* The following passage, produced by the same writer, affords a most apt example of the use of the term *laos* and *cleros* among the Jews. "Yet they are thy people, and thine inheritance, which thou broughtest out by thy mighty power, and by thy stretched-out arm."† in which verse the same people are termed both *laos* and *cleros*, or to translate the words in their more modern acceptation, both *laity* and *clergy*: and so these terms are currently employed throughout the Old Testament. The appropriation of *cleros* to themselves affords a convincing proof, that the churchmen carried their imitation of the Jewish priesthood no farther than happened to suit their own temporal interests. This distinction of *clergy* and *laity*, proposed for the most selfish purposes, was admitted by the ignorance of the people: they easily identified the cause of *God's inheritance* with that of *God himself*, and piously considered that they could not more effectually propitiate the latter, than by heaping wealth, honor and power upon the former.

41. The simple ceremonial of the primitive church, was, in a great measure, borrowed from the Jewish synagogues. Not only the names "bishop," "presbyter," "minister," and "angel," are proved to have been derived from this source, but even the *place* in which Christians assemble is denominated by St. James a *synagogue*. But this view of the matter computed ill with the lofty ideas, generally entertained by the clergy of the fourth, fifth, and succeeding centuries. The ministers of "the weak and lowly Jesus," chose rather to represent themselves as a counterpart of the *Jewish priesthood*, to whose titles, splendour, and honors, they thought, or pretended to think, themselves entitled to succeed. The second destruction of Jerusalem under Adrian, by which even the Mosaiac institutions seemed finally terminated, first suggested to certain Christian pastors, weak, perhaps, rather than wicked, the notion that themselves and their brethren had succeeded to the rights and privileges of the Jewish priesthood. The

\* Deut. ix. 29.

† James ii. 2.