

heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in* heaven:" and the power so arrogantly claimed by the popes, is thus expressly delegated to all the apostles: "Whosoever sins ye remit they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain they are retained."†

142. As the apostleship, it may be added, was incommunicable, so no person could claim, on the ground of succession, the privileges or powers which it involved. He only was an apostle who had been sent by Christ himself to preach the Gospel, nor could either the character or the office be transferred or descend to others. So that, could the Romanists demonstrate both the supremacy of Peter, and his establishment as bishop of Rome, their argument would not have advanced a step, as no power, either spiritual or temporal, would in consequence accrue to the popes.

143. The superiority to which the Roman bishops very early aspired, and to which by dexterous management of a fortunate concurrence of circumstances, they at last attained, was arrogated and accounted for at different periods, on very different grounds. During the first four centuries, it is notorious, the advocates of the Roman see, resorted to the dignity and importance of the city, to the imperial edicts and rescripts, and to the decrees of councils—particularly those of the obscure council of Sardica.

144. Their succession from Peter began first to be noticed by the popes shortly before the accession of Constantine to the government of the empire; but the peculiar privileges which it was supposed to confer were altogether unknown till the fifth century, and were gradually increased in number, and amplified in extent, during many succeeding ages.

In his letter to Cyprian, Stephen First comments on the dignity of his see, and his succession from St. Peter, but founds no definite claim on either. The ingenious argument, which contributed so powerfully not only to rear, but, during many ages, to support, the hierarchy, was first seriously urged by Innocent. The dulness which the popes had shown in arriving at this important discovery was amply compensated by the zeal with which they employed it after it was made. The authority which before they willingly referred to the emperors and Councils, was now boldly demanded as the gift of heaven. They naturally ceased to allege the wealth of their see, and the splendour of the capital, as the grounds of superiority, when they could evince a positive warrant, through Peter, from the great Founder of Christianity himself. What, before, men might attack as improper or inconvenient, was now raised above such cavils by the sublimity of a divine appointment and to attempt the demolition of an edifice so reared, were "to fight against God."

The power moreover, which had rested on the uncertain foundation of rescripts and decrees, might, by the removal of them, fall to the ground. No such instability could attach to the Papal dominion, when it was discovered to stand on the immutable basis of a *jus divinum*.

145. The kind and degree of power, also conferred by the rescripts of the emperors, and the decrees of councils, were perfectly ascertained. It would, for example, have required no common ingenuity to show that the "liberty of judging bishops," bestowed on the papal chair by Valentinian, included the right of deposing kings; or that a "superiority as to the rights of the apostolic see, and an equality as to

the* ministry" comprehended an absolute power to forgive sins.

There was, on the contrary no *species* or *extent* of power which the *divine right* might not easily include. An unlimited jurisdiction in heaven, in earth, and under the earth, was conferred by the custody of the *keys* which could with equal facility unlock the gates of paradise and of purgatory.

146. The ancient mode, however, of asserting the superiority of the Roman see, was not relinquished immediately on the discovery of another and a more effective method. Time was required, during which the new argument might acquire weight, if not by its *intrinsic validity*, at least by the effect of continual reiteration. Zosimus, accordingly, the successor of Innocent, deigned to imitate former popes, in founding his right of interference with other churches, on the vulgar grounds of decrees, rescripts, and his residence in the capital,

147. But the necessity of a change in the grounds on which the popes should raise their see to a supremacy in the church, became, after the commencement of the fifth century, every day more apparent. "The city of Constantinople was now superior in dignity to that of Rome. It was the sole imperial city in the whole christian world, and Rome only the metropolis of a small kingdom; the kingdom of Italy. The councils had all founded the pre eminence, honours, and privileges, granted by them to the see of Rome, on the dignity of the city, and the regard and respect that were due to the metropolis, and seat of the empire. That foundation was not withdrawn, and Gelasius did not know but as two œcumenical councils, of Constantinople and Chalcedon, had placed the rival see next in dignity to that of Rome, a third might upon the same principle, raise it above the see of Rome, as it had been already raised above that of Alexandria and Antioch. To prevent this, and lay a new foundation that could not be removed, and at the same time might support the primacy, whatever became of the city; he, Pope Gelasius, enacted a decree, boldly declaring, as if all records had been destroyed, and men knew nothing of what happened but a few years before, that "it was not to any councils, or the *decrees* of any, that the Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church owed her primacy, but to the words of our Saviour, 'Thou art Peter, &c.' and thereby building the church upon him as upon a rock, that nothing could shake; that the Roman church, not having spot or wrinkle, was consecrated above all other churches, by the presence, as well as the death, and martyrdom, and glorious triumph of the two chief apostles, Peter and Paul, who suffered at Rome, under Nero, not at different, as the heretics say, but at the same time and on the same day; and that the Roman church is the first church, because founded by the first † Apostle," &c

This event, one of the most audacious in the history of the hierarchy, happened in the conclusion of the fifth century.

148. When first the claim of succession from Peter was set up, the persons themselves by whom it was made did not probably foresee its consequences. The only purpose which Innocent appears to have had in view, was to refer the power he *then* possessed, not to those sources from which it was undoubtedly derived, but to a divine right. But the plea which would justify the degree of superiority already attained, might be equally urged for the purpose of arrogating and justifying any greater degree. The important advantage which he conferred upon the successors

* Math. xviii. 18.
† John xxi. 23.

* The words of a letter addressed by an Italian synod to Gratian, A. D. 275.

† Bow. Hist. of Popes, vol. ii. p. 233.