

greatly depend on the state of that society in which they are called to labour. In the age of the Church immediately succeeding the apostolic, only a small proportion of the people in any country could read. If the Christian minister, in such an age, were only able to read the scriptures in the vernacular tongue, he had so far an advantage over the bulk of his auditory, and was able to instruct them. At a much later period when Popish darkness began to overspread the Church, not only the body of the people were not able to read, but even multitudes of the priests were unable.—At this period, nevertheless, whatever learning remained was to be found among the priesthood: hence to read and write were then esteemed clerical accomplishments. Now this deplorable ignorance in the Clergy might be tolerable in an age when even Kings could not sign their own names, and when the most powerful of their barons had never even seen a book or a pen; a learned ministry for such Kings, barons, and people, might not be very necessary; but a more improved state of society must evidently require higher qualifications in its religious instructors.

It is proper to advert, in connection with this state and era of the Church, to the evils which resulted from such ignorance in the priesthood. During this total eclipse of all learning the corruptions of Popery were engendered. The priests in general not being able either to read or write; & copies of the scriptures being only to be found on the most obscure shelves of libraries; the word of God ceased to be the guide and standard of the Church, and doctrines were inculcated, and ceremonies enjoined, and pretensions set up, which never could have existed had the Bible been in general circulation. Let it be

observed, that we ascribe the worst of those corruptions which deform the Christian church to the ignorance, rather than the wilful perversion of the priesthood. They did not know when they were misled and imposed on by their ecclesiastical rules, because they had not the scriptures to which they might appeal, nor the learning necessary to qualify them to make it, and hence space was afforded for the growth of that corrupt system, which has for many ages enthralled Christendom, and which is still perpetuated in those portions of it, where the free use of the scriptures is forbidden to the people—or where the people being denied instruction in the art of reading, cannot peruse them. Had the early Christians possessed the ability of spreading the blessings of education with the truths of the gospel, or had the Roman Emperors when they received the Christian priesthood under their protection, been at the same time duly solicitous for the education of their subjects, we might almost venture to assert that the stream of sacred truth had then come down to us unpolluted. But the school was not in that age deemed an essential buttress of the temple; no provision was made for the education of the people; the priests, originally not much their superiors, sunk in process of time to their level, and errors of the most pernicious and inveterate description engrafted themselves on the system of revealed truth, and now plead, and with many successfully, their antiquity, as a reason for their continuance. Such melancholy facts in the history of the Church may serve to point out the general connection between an educated priesthood, and an educated people. When the people are well instructed, the standard of qualification must rise among their religious teachers. On the contrary,