

The Dark Ages—The Worker in Gold.

SOME people are very fond of talking about the "Dark Ages," as though then all was hypocrisy and crime. Now we grant that superstition soon began to creep into the church, for the opportunities of knowledge were then very few; but yet we often feel disposed to fear that their superstition was far better than our terrible worldly-mindedness, and disputatious self-righteousness. At all events, while it is our duty to be deeply thankful for that blaze of Gospel light which has enabled us to escape from those religious errors into which their ignorance betrayed them, our readers may rely upon it that very many are the lessons which their earnest simple devotion, and fervent, self-denying labours would teach us, if we had only the grace of humility sufficient to receive them.

We will go back, therefore, to the seventh century, which is thought by many to be a most gloomy and terrible period of religious corruption.

Christianity had now spread very widely over the world. The glad tidings had been carried from the Hill of Judea, along the shores of the Great Sea (the Mediterranean sea). On the coasts of Asia and the shores of Africa, the Church had taken root—bishops had been chosen, and temples raised to the true God. Among the mountains of Italy, and the villages of Switzerland, the woody heights of Spain, and on the sunny plains of France, the name of Christ had been heard, and welcomed with joy. Even in Persia, Syria, and far-off India, the truth was spreading; while in Britain, the lonely island in the North Sea, the King of Kent, with ten thousand of his Anglo-Saxons, had been baptized, and Theodore of Tarsus made Archbishop of Canterbury. An Irish missionary, Columbanus, with holy zeal, had brought light and cheer to the Pagans of Gaul, and then had passed over to labour amongst the Swiss and Germans. It is in the Gaul of this seventh century that we will take our first picture of what living Christians were actually doing.

It happened that the King of a certain part of France, towards the end of the sixth century, fancied that he should like to have made for him a throne of gold. He was a rich and powerful king, but he could meet with no workmen able to make what he wanted. The gold and jewels were ready, but the skill to fashion

them was not to be found amongst his people. So at least thought the king.

Meanwhile the king's treasurer, who knew what his master was searching for, sought diligently amongst the trades of the city for some one who could execute the sovereign's order. And at last he found what he sought.

He heard of a young craftsman who had travelled from a neighbouring country to the royal city, and seemed as if in search of work, or, what was more likely, to improve himself in the knowledge of his craft. All that the treasurer heard of the young man pleased him. He was not only a very clever workman, but beloved by all his companions, and all who knew him, as a kind and single-hearted man, of gentle manners, and of a godly life. In short, he was a real Christian, working hard at his trade, cheerfully and contentedly, as God had appointed.

In his own country he had been a worker in gold, sometimes under his master in the mint, at other times engaged at other kinds of work in silver and gold.

As soon as the young craftsman heard what the king had so long wished for, he undertook at once to make the golden throne, and that it should be fashioned exactly as the king desired.

This was good news for the king, who at once ordered the proper quantity of gold to be given to the young craftsman, and begged that the work might be instantly commenced. Perhaps it is as well here to say that the craftsman's name was Eloi, or Eligius.

Eloi, then, worked with all diligence at the throne of gold, and soon found that the king had entrusted to him sufficient metal to form two thrones instead of one. Instead of falsely secreting this share of gold, as he might have done, he with great skill and diligence formed a second throne. When both were finished he went at once to the palace, and produced one of the thrones for the king's approval. The sovereign was much pleased with the work of Eligius, praised his skill and diligence, and commanded a reward to be bestowed upon him.

Great indeed was his surprise when the faithful workman produced a second throne equally beautiful and well wrought as the first. It seemed impossible that both could have been formed out of the quantity of gold the craftsman had received, and yet such was the case.