

From the Tablet.

Rome as it was under Paganism, and as it became under the Popes. 2 vols. London. Madder, 1842

This is a very remarkable work; an erudite conscientious, and eloquent dissertation. Indeed, we have reason to be surprised at finding such a work issue from a Protestant publisher, and unadorned by a Catholic name on the title-page. We have had recently many historical treatises in which bywriters, not of our faith, a certain degree of justice is done to Catholic actors on the stage of human affairs, and a certain degree of Catholicity of tone is adopted in appreciating the course of great events. We have had Voigt and Hurter, Guizot and Pargrave, and in a lower degree Ranke. But in the works of none of them have we met with that justness of judgment, and perfect soundness of feeling which characterize the production now before us. The author—be he Protestant or Catholic—has succeeded in producing on the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, and the reproduction under new forms of Roman influence by the Popes and the Church an original and most valuable work—far more valuable, indeed, than we at first anticipated from its title and general appearance.

But, while we have been thus highly gratified, the very excellence of these volumes has in part rendered us dissatisfied. The excellent author has done so much that we can hardly help asking why he has not done more. He has produced an eloquent dissertation, a series of graphic sketches, a work of deep thought, and patient investigation—why has he not produced a history? He has shown all the power of a great historian, why have we not the fruits of that power? He has touched with a master-hand upon most of the great and difficult subjects that occur on the confines of two civilizations—the breaking up of the old Pagan and the founding of the new Christian—he has touched them, and in many instances he has even worked them up in detail with consummate ability. We suppose we must attribute it to the diffidence natural to one who knows better than the less learned, all the difficulties of his task, and who naturally shrinks from competition with the great names that have passed over the field before him, that he has chosen to cast in such a fragmentary shape a work that well deserves a noble and more enduring garniture. We humbly venture to think, however, that our author cannot stop where he is. His book is, indeed, no criticism on Gibbon's great and abominable history; it is a new and original work in every respect, and stands upon its own basis. But yet it furnishes an antidote to Gibbon's poison, and supplies a masterly outline of a history which should be written to depict for Christians those all-momentous scenes of the modern world, which Gibbon has depicted for Atheists and sensualists.

It seems clear to us, on a first perusal of these volumes, that their author, having now cast his metal for the first time into its present mould, has been not a little hampered by the very opulence of his materials, and the narrowness of the

space to which he has confined himself. Indeed, we think we discern a change of plan—very natural, and, we think very fortunate. In the earlier portions of the first volume the author has tried his hand at a sort of dramatic management, in which, though under the form of speeches and imaginary scenes, he has given us many able and learned disquisitions, he yet, as a dramatist, failed utterly. His characters are no characters at all; and his eloquence, instead of being the eloquence of the prose poet, is (what it is most naturally) the eloquence of an accomplished orator. Now, no two things can be more distinct than poetical and oratorical skill, and few are they who have been able to combine both. We respectfully suggest that our author is not of this small number. But without this, enough praise is left him. His eloquence is of that sort that well befits an historian. It is weighty, serious, and impressive; with little occasional touches indeed—not ungraceful, nor ungrateful—of what, if the book had been published in Dublin, we might have called *Hibernian colouring*, but no more than suffice to give a character to the style, and are perfectly warranted by the half-imaginative form he has chosen as the vehicle of his thoughts. His narrative style is clear, perspicuous and animated; and when quitting his fictitious scenes he comes, in the middle of his work, to the naked facts and narratives of history, he leaves little to be desired.

It is impossible, in the short compass to which we are necessarily confined, to give anything like an adequate analysis of so important a production as the one we are now treating of. Still less is it possible to give any adequate notion of its contents by extracts; but we must try what we can do in both ways. Let us take the first book for an example. It consists of thirteen chapters. The first chapter opens with the approach of St. Peter to Rome along the Appian way "barefooted and in silence." Around him are imagined embassies with costly gifts, envoys from the climes of India, astrologers from Chaldaea, merchants and magicians, priests and sorcerers. Asiatic monarchs, Moorish kings, and Parthian satraps, "bearing the tribute and the offering of all people to the queen of empires and the domicile of all the Gods." He meets coming from Rome to the suburban sepulchres by the way side, the pagans and processions of Death, in which the Epicurean population of Rome, devoted to sensuality and practical Atheism, still recognized, though after a grotesque fashion, the sacredness of death and the imperishable hopes of immortality. In the second chapter we have a description of what St. Peter, in his pilgrimage to Rome, must have seen of the various modes in which the affection of the survivors for the deceased displayed itself; and a dissertation on the "double worship" imported from Egypt, by which among the people the notion of future rewards and punishments was insidiously maintained. The third chapter treats of the initiation into the inner or more mysterious worship, the greater and the less-

er mysteries; in the later of which the popular doctrine was even more assiduously and more impressively inculcated, while in the former was imparted the "great secret" of the imposture of the popular worship, the higher dogmas of one God and the spiritual immortality, and also the infinite importance of maintaining at all hazards the imposture as a convenient political instrument. The fourth chapter describes the undermining of this old system by the "free enquiry" of Socrates and his successors, the gradual degradation of all the religious festivals into avowedly licentious and insincere mummery, and the gradual rise of the Epicurean philosophy, by which sensuality and Atheism were refined and reduced to a system, yet without extinguishing altogether that instinct of immortality which no philosophy has been able to root out of the human soul. Having shown how the holy pilgrim, then entering into Rome was prepared with a message and a secret which should prove to this dissolute and desperate Epicurean route that some one had risen from the dead and brought tidings of another world, and of the attainment of victory over death, our author carries St. Peter, and his meek companion, St. Mark, into one of the lofty Roman Palaces, the luxury and effeminacy of which are well described. In this palace "the first he met," St. Peter begins his mission, and is thrust out violently and ignominiously. The sixth chapter contains a dramatic dialogue, the substance of which is taken from the "Pusculan Questions," in which Lucan, Seneca, &c. &c. bear parts, and in which they endeavour by vague and baseless philosophical reasonings to administer comfort to Servilius Pudens, "a venerable senator, from whose embrace a son and heir, a youth of extraordinary promise, had been torn away by death." This dialogue opens the way for a delineation from Tacitus of the unutterable baseness and loathsomeness of the condition of the upper classes—the best educated and most lofty-speaking—under the tyranny of Nero, and in particular the hollow villainy of Seneca and Lucan. The seventh chapter treats of the influence of religion, the old Pagan superstitions, as the corner-stone of the Roman Empire, the binding principle of its heterogeneous elements, and the source of the aristocratic authority from the beginning. In the downfall of this religious element, our author teaches us to see the loosening of the binding principle, the destruction of aristocratic authority, the commencement of anarchy, unvarnished military violence, the reign of brute force, and the consequent downfall of the empire. The eighth chapter shows us how the writing of Cicero and "the avowed infidelity of Cæsar," tended to diffuse scepticism among all classes, and thus to revolutionize the state. In the ninth chapter the philosophical dialogue, interrupted for a time by these disquisitions, is resumed by Seneca, and by Cassius, who denounce the day-dreams of philosophy, pronounce an early death a blessing, execrate religion, utters a curse on the day of his birth, and exclaims that no one

"but a ruthless demon could have flung man into this terrestrial Tartarus." With these philosophical ravings the writer ably contrasts Christianity, in which the loftiest dreams of Plato find a perfect solution; and introduces St. Peter to the conference to proclaim his authority as the vicegerent of a crucified God, and as able practically to solve the problem of a resurrection, both by his own testimony as to Christ, and by his power to restore the disconsolate father to comfort in raising his half-corrupted child from the jaws of death. With this miracle, and a description of its various effects upon the guests there assembled, the first book closes.

In giving this analysis, we have taken the first, and, in some respects, the worst, or, at least, the least satisfactory, of the six books into which these two volumes are divided. We have selected it both because it is the first, and because even the meagre outline we have been able to give will suffice to prove how judiciously our author has selected his topics, with what a true understanding of his subject he has at the outset put his finger upon the essential conditions of the problem which was to find its solution in the destruction of one empire and the production of another. He has gone to the heart of the Roman Empire in viewing it under its religious aspect. With Gibbon, the Roman Empire is a military monarchy derived from a military aristocracy, and religion comes upon the scene as a comparatively unessential adjunct to the human elements of the drama. The present writer, with a truer insight, sees the religion of superstition as the animating spirit of Rome while it flourished; and in the decay of that spirit he sees the decay of the empire. He sees Christianity, also from its true point of view, as a great spiritual, monarchical hierarchy, at deadly war with—not an accident of old Rome—but with its inmost life-essence; and successfully struggling to replace the old body and soul with a new body and soul, restored, regenerated, and disenthralled.

The second book throws a retrospective glance over the earlier history and varying greatness of the Commonwealth, its miseries, factions, and massacres, and the final establishment of the empire. It then traces the application of the prophecies of Daniel. Afterwards it gives a lively picture of the contemporary history of Nero, the murder of his mother by the Emperor, the base servility of his courtiers and senate, the burning of Rome, the persecution of the Christians, and the outward splendour and promised eternity of the Empire. From that point it sketches, often in great detail, through the remaining four books, the leading incidents of history up to the completion of the cycle in the emancipation of Rome from the dominion of the East, the triumph of Orthodox Christianity over the barbarians, and the consolidation of all these conquests in the Coronation of Charlemagne. Through this mighty current of events we cannot, of course, linger, and we must now bid farewell, to a work which has given us very great satisfaction, with an extract, as in some soiled sample of our author's style and manner.

[Extract next week]