

period, that it has been emphatically described by ecclesiastical historians, as the DARK AGES. It is not, however, our intention to pursue the history of the church through these nocturnal centuries, and narrate the heresies, divisions, and superstitions by which it was disgraced; such enlargement would not comport with that brevity which it is necessary for us to observe, nor would it, we apprehend, be found generally interesting; or useful to our readers. And yet, before we proceed to the glorious era of the Reformation, the state of the church in the twelfth century claims our notice—exhibiting, as it does to us, in at least one section of it, a community of Christians distinguished for piety, purity and humility, amidst abounding corruption.

Of all the sects that arose in this century, none was more distinguished by the reputation it acquired, by the multitude of its votaries, and the testimony which its bitterest enemies bore to the probity and innocence of its members, than that of the Waldenses, so called from their parent and founder, Peter Waldus. This sect was known by different denominations. From the place where it first appeared, its members were called The poor men of Lyons, or Lyonists; and, from the wooden shoes which its doctors wore, and a certain mark that was stamped upon these shoes, they were called Insabbatati, or Sabbatati. The origin of this famous sect was as follows: Peter, an opulent merchant of Lyons, surnamed Valdenis, or Validisus, from Vaux, or Waldum, a town in the marquisate of Lyons, being extremely zealous for the advancement of true piety, and Christian knowledge, employed a certain priest, about the year 1160, in translating from Latin into French the Four Gospels, with other books of Holy Scripture, and the most remarkable sentences of the ancient doctors, which were so highly esteemed in this century. But no sooner had he perused these sacred books with a proper degree of attention, than he perceived that the religion, which was now taught in the Roman church, differed totally from that which was originally inculcated by Christ and his apostles. Struck with this glaring contradiction between the doctrines of the pontiffs and the truths of the gospel, and animated with a pious zeal for promoting his own salvation, and that of others, he abandoned his mercantile vocation, distributed his riches among the poor, and forming an association with other pious men, who had adopted his sentiments and his turn of devotion, he began, in the year 1160, to assume the quality of a public teacher, and to instruct the multitude in the doctrines and precepts of Christianity. The Archbishop of Lyons, and the other rulers of the church in that province, opposed, with vigour, this new doctor in the exercise of his ministry. But their opposition was unsuccessful; for the purity and simplicity of that religion which these good men taught, the spotless innocence that shone forth in their lives and actions, and the noble contempt of riches and honours which was conspicuous in the whole of their conduct and conversation, appeared so engaging to all such as had any sense of true piety, that the number of their disciples and followers increased from day to day. They accordingly formed religious assemblies, first in France, and afterwards in Lombardy, from whence they propagated their sect throughout the other provinces of Europe with incredible rapidity, and with such invincible fortitude, that neither fire nor sword, nor the most cruel inventions of merciless persecution, could damp their zeal, or entirely ruin their cause.

The attempts of Peter Waldus and his followers were neither employed nor designed to introduce new doctrines into the church, nor to propose new articles of faith to Christians. All they aimed at was, to reduce the form of ecclesiastical government, and the lives and manners both of the clergy and people, to that amiable simplicity, and that primitive sanctity, that characterized the apostolic ages, and which appear so strongly recommended in the precepts and injunctions of the divine author of our holy religion. In consequence of this design, they complained that the Roman church had degenerated, under Constantine the Great, from its primitive purity and sanctity. They denied the supremacy of the Roman pontiff, and maintained that the rulers and ministers of the church were obliged, by their vocation, to imitate the poverty of the apostles, and to procure for themselves a subsistence by the work of their hands. They also maintained

Christian as in a certain measure qualified and authorised to instruct, exhort, and confirm the brethren in their Christian course, and demanded the restoration of the ancient penitential discipline of the church, i. e. the expiation of transgressions by prayer, fasting, and alms, which the new invented doctrine of indulgences had almost totally abolished. They, at the same time, affirmed, that every pious Christian was qualified and entitled to prescribe to the penitents the kind and degree of satisfaction or expiation that their transgressions required; that confession made to priests was by no means necessary, since the humble offender might acknowledge his sins and testify his repentance to any true believer, and might expect from such, the counsels and admonitions that his case and circumstances demanded. They maintained, that the power of delivering sinners from the guilt and punishment of their offences belonged to God alone; and that indulgences, of consequence, were the criminal inventions of sordid avarice. They looked upon the prayers, and other ceremonies, that were instituted in behalf of the dead, as vain, useless, and absurd; and denied the existence of departed souls in an intermediate state of purification, affirming, that they were immediately, upon their separation from the body, received into heaven, or thrust down to hell. These, and other tenets of a like nature, composed the system of doctrine propagated by the Waldenses. Their rules of practice were extremely austere: for they adopted, as the model of their moral discipline, the Sermon of Christ on the mount, which they interpreted and explained in the most rigorous and literal manner, and, of consequence, prohibited and condemned in their society all wars, and suits of law, all attempts toward the acquisition of wealth, the inflicting of capital punishments, self-defence against unjust violence, and oaths of all kinds.

The piety and fidelity of these simple-hearted and devoted followers of Christ awakened the wrath of the Roman pontiff, and gave birth to that formidable and odious tribunal called the Inquisition. During the whole course of the thirteenth century, (says Mosheim,) the Roman pontiffs carried on the most barbarous and inhuman persecution against those whom they branded with the denomination of heretics; i. e. against all those who called their pretended authority and jurisdiction in question, or taught doctrines different from those which were adopted and propagated by the church of Rome. For the sects of the Catharists, Waldenses, Petrobrussians, &c., gathered strength from day to day, spread imperceptibly throughout all Europe, assembled numerous congregations in Italy, France, Spain, and Germany, and formed by degrees such a powerful party, as rendered them formidable to the Roman pontiffs, and menaced the papal jurisdiction with a fatal revolution. To the ancient sects new factions were added, which, though they differed from each other in various respects, yet were all unanimously agreed in this one point, viz: "That the public and established religion was a motley system of errors and superstition; and that the dominion which the popes had usurped over Christians, as also the authority they exercised in religious matters, were unlawful and tyrannical. Such were the notions propagated by the sectaries, who refuted the superstitions and impostures of the times by arguments drawn from the Holy Scriptures, and whose declamations against the power, the opulence, and the vices of the pontiffs and clergy, were extremely agreeable to many princes and civil magistrates, who groaned under the usurpation of the sacred order. The pontiffs, therefore, considered themselves as obliged to have recourse to new and extraordinary methods of defeating and subduing enemies, who, both by their number and their rank, were every way proper to fill them with terror.

The number of these dissenters from the church of Rome was nowhere greater than in Narbonne Gaul, and the countries adjacent, where they were received and protected, in a singular manner, by Raymond VI., Earl of Thoulouse, and other persons of the highest distinction; and where the bishops, either through humanity or indolence, were so negligent and remiss in the prosecution of heretics, that the latter, laying aside all their fears, formed settlements, and multiplied prodigiously from day to day. Innocent III. was soon informed of all these proceedings; and, about the commencement of this century, sent

France, to do what the bishops had left undone, and to extirpate heresy, in all its various forms and modifications, without being at all scrupulous in using such methods as might be necessary to effect this salutary purpose. The persons charged with this ghastly commission were Rainier, a Cistercian monk, Pierre de Castelnau, Archdeacon of Maguelone, who became also afterwards a Cistercian friar. These eminent missionaries were followed by several others, among whom was the famous Spaniard Dominic, founder of the order of preachers, who, returning from Rome in the year 1200, fell in with these delegates, embarked in their cause, and laboured, both by his exhortations and actions, in the extirpation of heresy. These spiritual champions, who engaged in this expedition upon the sole authority of the Pope, without either asking the advice, or demanding the succours of the bishops, and who inflicted capital punishment upon such of the heretics as they could not convert by reason and argument, were distinguished, in common discourse, by the title of Inquisitors, and from them the formidable and odious tribunal called the Inquisition derived its original.

When this new set of heresy-hunters had executed their commission, and purged the provinces to which they were sent of the greatest part of the enemies of the Roman faith, the pontiffs were so sensible of their excellent services, that they established missionaries of a like nature, or, in other words, placed Inquisitors in almost every city whose inhabitants had the misfortune to be suspected of heresy, notwithstanding the reluctance which the people showed to this new institution, and the violence with which they frequently expelled, and sometimes massacred, those bloody officers of the popish hierarchy. The council held at Thoulouse, in the year 1229, by Romanus, Cardinal of St. Angelo, and pope's legate, went still farther, and erected in every city a council of inquisitors, consisting of one priest and three laymen. This institution was, however, superseded, in the year 1233, by Gregory IX., who intrusted the Dominicans, or preaching friars, with the important commission of discovering and bringing to judgment the heretics that were lurking in France, and, in a formal epistle, discharged the bishops from the burden of that painful office. Immediately after this, the Bishop of Tournay, who was the pope's legate in France, began to execute this new resolution, by appointing Pierre Cellan, and Guillaume Arnaud, inquisitors of heretical pravity at Thoulouse, and afterwards proceeded in every city, where the Dominicans had a convent, to constitute officers of the same nature, chosen from among the monks of that celebrated order. From this period we are to date the commencement of the dreadful tribunal of the Inquisition, which, in this and the following ages, subdued such a prodigious multitude of heretics, part of whom were converted to the church by terror, and the rest committed to the flames without mercy. For the Dominicans erected, first at Thoulouse, and afterwards at Carcassone, and other places, a tremendous court, before which were summoned not only heretics and persons suspected of heresy, but likewise all who were accused of magic, sorcery, Judaism, witchcraft, and other crimes of that kind. This tribunal, in process of time, was erected in the other countries of Europe, though not every where with the same success.

The method of proceeding, in this court of inquisition was at first simple, and almost in every respect similar to that which was observed in the ordinary courts of justice. But this simplicity was gradually changed by the Dominicans, to whom experience suggested several new methods of augmenting the pomp and majesty of their spiritual tribunal, and who made such alterations in the forms of proceeding, that the manner of taking cognizance of heretical causes became totally different from that which was usual in civil affairs. These friars were, to say the truth, entirely ignorant of judicial matters; nor were they acquainted with the procedures of any other tribunal, than that which was called, in the Roman church, the Tribunal of Penance. It was, therefore, after this, that they modelled the new court of inquisition, as far as a resemblance between the two was possible; and hence arose that strange system of inquisitorial law, which, in many respects, is contrary to the