

# The Church.

"HER FOUNDATIONS ARE UPON THE HOLY HILLS."

THEREFORE I WILL NOT BE NEGLIGENT TO PUT YOU ALWAYS IN REMEMBRANCE OF THESE THINGS, THOUGH YE KNOW THEM AND BE ESTABLISHED IN THE PRESENT TRUTH.—2 PETER 1, 12.

VOLUME II.]

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[NUMBER L.]

## Original Poetry.

For the Church.

### A MEDITATION.

Hallowed be thy Name.—*Lord's Prayer.*  
We beseech thee, give us that due sense of all Thy mercies that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we shew forth thy praise, not only with our lips but in our lives; by giving up ourselves to Thy service.—*General Thanksgiving.*  
We offer and present unto Thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto Thee.—*Communion Service.*

I.  
Not a word was said—not a lonely word  
Of Him, all night, was spoken;  
Not once was the praise of a SAVIOUR heard  
From hearts "contrite and broken."

II.  
Not once, as a dear and welcome sound  
Was JESUS by us muttered,  
And it felt as though it had strange been found  
Had that holy Name been uttered!

III.  
Yet as CHRISTIANS we met, and we bore the name  
Of pilgrim brethren speeding  
To a mutual home—his praise to proclaim,  
Who for us all died bleeding.

IV.  
And on things of time, and on earthly dreams,  
We commun'd with eager joy;  
But where was the love of those blessed themes,  
That the ransom'd of Christ employ?

V.  
Though our gracious God we besought to bless  
The food from his bounteous store;  
'Twas an echo brief in the wilderness,—  
And the voice of praise was o'er!

VI.  
Unhallow'd by talk, or by holy song,  
Or the Bible's purer ray,  
On his upward flight, Time hurried along—  
With his records passed away.\*

VII.  
Oh, do we implore our Father above  
To hallow his holy Name,  
Nor shrink from the sin of their mocking love,  
Who in practice that God disclaim?

VIII.  
Oh, do we but Sabbath-professions† make,  
Nor feel the service we say?  
Alas! should his judgments against us wake,  
And, forever, forbid to pray!‡

IX.  
And in Christ's holy feast mere forms attend,  
Where his faithful disciples meet,—  
Where the Spirit expects glad hearts to blend  
In one communion sweet?

X.  
Oh, do we forget or despise our vows  
To the holy Triune God?  
And shall we provoke till our spirit bows  
Beneath his chastening rod?

XI.  
Oh, can we that crucified "Friend" deceive,  
Who is Mercy, Truth, and Love?  
Shall our waywardness still his Spirit grieve,  
While Christ for us pleads above?

XII.  
Forgive us, O Father; O Saviour, forgive,  
Nor in justice visit our sin!  
Oh, spare us, and send us thy grace to give  
A clean heart and right spirit within!

AMICUS.

May, 1838.

\* "Every hour comes to us charged with duty, and the moment it is past, returns to heaven, to register itself how spent.—My hours how trifled, sensualized, sauntered, dozed, sinned away!"—*Rev. Thos. Adam.*

† "The appearance of religion only on Sundays, proves that it is only an appearance."—*Rev. Thos. Adam.*

‡ See Bickersteth on Prayer.

### GIBBON.\*

Of the deistical writers who, about a century ago, were regarded by the friends of Christianity in this country with so much alarm, scarcely any are now read; very few are even remembered. The pompous objections of Bolingbroke, and the acute sophistry of Hume, have almost reached the state of oblivion which has been already attained by the less attractive writings of their predecessors. There is one work, however, of a decidedly infidel character which retains its place in our literature, unaffected by the lapse of sixty years. The scholar and the man of the world still turn for information and amusement to "The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire."

The reviving taste for the study of history has recalled this work into a degree of popularity which it had lost during the stirring times which marked the commencement of the present century. The jealousy and dislike with which it was regarded by two generations are scarcely shared by a liberal age. A handsome edition, superintended by an ingenious and accomplished clergyman, is courting a new generation of readers. The book is studied and referred to. It will therefore scarcely be deemed unseasonable to attempt an estimate of its real character and value.

It is well known how the work of Gibbon was received by those of his contemporaries who felt interested in the cause of religion. Such was the alarm which was excited by the publication of the first volume, that the author himself confessed that "had he believed that the majority of English readers were so fondly attached even to the name and shadow of Christianity,—had he foreseen that the pious, the timid, and the prudent, would feel, or affect to feel, with such exquisite sensibility," he might have observed greater

caution. And the warmth and earnestness with which it was attacked by theologians of all ranks and parties sufficiently showed the importance which was attached to it as an attempt to undermine the divine authority of the Gospel, and to weaken the principles of morality.

Yet it is perhaps scarcely correct to regard it as a deliberate attempt to unchristianize our literature. It more probably owed its infidel character to mere vanity and affectation. The author was by education and in manners a Frenchman. As he had no fixed principles, he very naturally adopted the tone and opinions of his foreign associates. He had learned from his early years to regard his countrymen as unpolished and unenlightened, and he was willing to astonish them by a display of paradox and sophistry. These and some still more obvious peculiarities of the author's personal character, sufficiently explain what is most objectionable in the "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire."

The history of his life, which has been communicated by his own pen, is curious and interesting. He was born at Putney, in Surrey, in the year 1737. His father was a gentleman in easy circumstances, who represented Hampshire in two Parliaments. He was early deprived of his mother, but a maternal aunt reared him with a mother's tenderness. The deficiency of his health caused his early education to be greatly neglected. But he had from his early childhood an insatiable thirst for reading. In his fifteenth year he "arrived at Oxford with a stock of erudition which might have puzzled a doctor, and a degree of ignorance of which a schoolboy would have been ashamed." At Magdalen College he was neglected by his tutors, and fell into habits of dissipation and extravagance. His taste for discursive reading led him to books of religious controversy; "and at the age of sixteen he bewildered himself in the errors of the Church of Rome." He professed himself a Papist. And his father, who regarded his conduct as an act of insubordination, immediately removed him from the university.

This was the event which determined the character of his future life. He was sent from England, and, under the care of M. Pavilliard, a reformed minister at Lausanne, in whose family he remained nearly five years, zealously pursued his classical studies and soon renounced the peculiarities of Romanism. But these rapid changes of opinion permanently impaired his principles; and he appears soon to have subsided into a state of indifference or scepticism, which, in the course of his intercourse with French society, eventually settled into positive infidelity. At Lausanne, however, he read with diligence and success, and laid the foundation of his future learning. In 1758 his father allowed him to return to England. His first work, (*Essai sur l'Etude de la Littérature*), which had been commenced at Lausanne, and was published in 1761, is a proof not only of his intimate acquaintance with the French language, but of his acquirements and talents.

In 1763 he again visited the continent. He then became acquainted with Paris, and made the tour of Italy. "It was at Rome, on the 15th of October, 1764, as he sat musing amidst the ruins of the Capitol," that he first conceived the idea of writing on the decline and fall of the capital of the world. Several other subjects, however, successively presented themselves to his mind as fit subjects for a historical composition. For several years he was too much engaged in society and intercourse with his family to find leisure for regular study. After the death of his father, in 1770, he was several years in Parliament; and it was not until 1776 that he published the first volume of the "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire."

His great work had, however, for some time before been the chief business of his life. He was engaged upon it with more or less activity from 1768 to 1787. The first three volumes and the greater part of the fourth were written in London, the remainder of the work at Lausanne, where he chiefly resided during the last ten years of his life. He returned, however, to England upon a visit to his intimate friend, Lord Sheffield, in 1793, and died in London, on the 16th of January, 1794.

The character of Gibbon, as it is exhibited by his autobiography and letters, reflects much light upon his writings. He has himself enabled us to describe him as a man of a cold and phlegmatic temperament, who was impelled to exertion only by motives of vanity and selfishness. If his life was marked by no flagrant irregularities, it is clear from his own account that the decency of his conduct did not proceed from any principle of conscience or any feeling for moral beauty. For learning, indeed, and a general acquaintance with literature, he must be ranked among the very first of his contemporaries. He had great natural sagacity; he had an inexhaustible thirst for knowledge; and was at once ingenious and diligent. But he had no dignity of mind, no elevation nor warmth of sentiment, no purity nor delicacy of taste. His knowledge of mankind was derived from a corrupt state of society, and from a corrupt heart. Self-devotion and disinterestedness were things beyond his comprehension; he could scarcely realize the possibility even of sincere belief, and virtue he regarded as an empty name.

His history largely partakes of the peculiarities of his moral and intellectual character. It is rich in various learning. It abounds in sagacious and acute reflections. But it is loaded with excessive ornament. It is absolutely destitute of moral purpose. It never rises beyond the material and visible. It constantly seeks to depress what is noble and lofty, while it places in strong relief whatever is mean and disgusting. Instead of endeavoring to inculcate some great ethical lesson, it only strives to confound the distinction between vice and virtue, and utterly to extinguish all respect for religion.

Voltaire had introduced a new method of historical composition. He had presumed to summon the past to the bar of the present, and to arraign it upon the enactments of an arbitrary *ex post facto* legislation. Under pretence of tracing the philosophy of history, he measured the men and things of other times by the standard of modern civiliza-

tion, and ventured to pronounce upon the probability or improbability of the testimony of contemporary authors, and to assign the motives which actuated the men of distant ages and countries, solely with reference to the principles which obtained among the Frenchmen of the eighteenth century. Thucydides and Tacitus had indeed painted the hearts of men, and disclosed the secret springs of events, but it was after having carefully studied the originals. They wrote of men who were still well remembered, or were actually their contemporaries. The first Frenchman of an enlightened age needed not this tedious and modest process. With the telescope of philosophy he might explore at will what was most remote in time or place, and tell others all that it was worth their while to know, without the vulgar aid of observation or learning. The laws of nature were always uniform, and men were always men, and men were, of course, always savages or Frenchmen. He wanted no other principles to know with positive certainty *how* and *why* they acted. Bare facts only served to load the memory, and enfeeble the understanding. *His* only was the way of studying history to advantage. It was only when expounded by the philosopher that it afforded any thing worth knowing by one who aspired to the dignity of a man. The novelty of this method, the reputation of its inventor, and the general sciolism, procured for it no little popularity. Acute and sober men were dazzled by its pretensions. Hume and Robertson had already naturalized it—purified, however, from its more flagrant absurdities—in the literature of Britain, when Gibbon caught the contagion, and aspired to the rank of a pragmatical historian.

Yet Gibbon was something more than a mere disciple of the historical school of Voltaire. He was well aware of its deficiencies. In his diffusive reading he had acquired no ordinary amount of erudition. From the time he had chosen the subject of his work he was eagerly engaged in the pursuit of the right materials. He knew what the historian had to do. He made it his business to find his way to the best information. His knowledge was perhaps often derived in the first instance from secondary writers—he freely confesses his obligations to Tillemont—but he generally verified important facts by referring to the sources, and he was rarely unacquainted with the discoveries of modern learning.

His learning indeed was his strongest point. His perseverance and sedentary industry well fitted him to make himself master of the information necessary for his subject. His private means enabled him to obtain books, and he was moreover generally in situations where he had access to public libraries. It could not be asserted that he was a scholar in the highest sense of the term. He had not the finish and accuracy which can be attained only by those who pursue learning as a profession. But he was most intimately acquainted with the materials of history. No one who has gone over the ground he professes to have surveyed can help seeing that he has been there before him. Students who are engaged in a particular inquiry may find much which has eluded his observation, but they will generally be surprised to find how much he knew. His references are frequently ostentatious, sometimes irrelevant, sometimes not strictly accurate; but what we find to complain of in them must usually be laid to other accounts, they do not go to impeach his learning.

The subject on which his acquirements were employed was a noble one. History does not present any thing more memorable than the decay and extinction of ancient civilization. "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," as a work of art, is well conceived, and executed with a rare ability. The distribution is felicitous, the composition is striking; notwithstanding the defects in drawing and perspective, it has an air of grandeur; and though the parts are often strangely out of proportion, we are scarcely sensible of a want of harmony in the whole. The great fault is, that it is so artificial. You scarcely ever lose the artist, and art is obtrusive every where. The style is affected and labored to a degree positively offensive. There is no variety of construction or manner. There is a total absence of nature. The ornaments are all of the most gaudy and meretricious sort. We are displeased at once by effort and insipidity.

It was in the highest qualifications of the historian that Gibbon was most deficient. He had no large views, nor lofty feelings. He could not disengage himself from the narrow circle of manners and fashion, nor sympathize with the genuine feelings of the human heart. He knew nothing of man as a moral being. His imagination was inflamed only by material objects. He was not awed by the sublimity of virtue; he felt no tenderness for human infirmities. He regarded what was morally great and disinterested with invincible scepticism, while he received with vulgar credulity every insinuation of evil.

But it is the malign aspect of his work towards Christianity and morality which constitutes its great fault, and renders it dangerous and noxious. Whatever may have been his motives, it is quite certain that he constantly makes it his business to treat the Gospel as a fable, and to sneer at the very idea of virtue. Every thing connected with revealed religion is exhibited in the light in which it may be regarded by a captious adversary. Though he did not in the remainder of his undertaking introduce any attack so direct as that which is contained in the last two chapters of his first volume, he never ceased to insinuate that Christianity was a mere system of imposture, devised by priests, and believed only by fanatics. He possessed in perfection the art which had been so successful in the hands of the French infidels, of conveying by insinuations and sarcasm opinions and sentiments which it was not convenient openly to avow. Without leaving the subject he has in hand, he can always find occasion to suggest doubts and ridicule. When the outline of the likeness he is painting is correct and accurate, he can produce the most objectionable effects by the choice of attitude and expression, and especially by coloring. Often when we cannot deny the resemblance, we can say em-

phatically that it conveys a false or most inadequate conception of the original. Mahomet is painted with all the luxuriance of Venetian art; Cyril and Bernard are rude caricatures. Constantine and Theodosius are heavy and ungracious; while all the resources of his skill are lavished upon Julian. Thus the reader of the "Decline and Fall" is defrauded of the fruits of human experience, and receives a deadly poison instead of the precious nourishment which is the natural produce of history and especially of the history of the Church.

It is really curious to observe how thoroughly Gibbon's work is saturated with his infidelity. The venom has been distilled into every part. His scepticism, and malevolence, and impurity, meet us every where. It is strange that any one could ever have supposed it possible to counteract its mischievous tendency by controverting particular statements, or refuting particular views. It is not easy to conceive how any one could read it, and fancy that any good could be done in this way. It mocks such an antidote. No one could make it any thing else than an infidel book without actually taking it to pieces. Little is gained even by expunging the most obnoxious passages; for an epithet sometimes presents a licentious picture, a conjunction often suggests an embarrassing doubt.

If these remarks have given a fair character of this celebrated work; it is almost needless to deduce a formal conclusion. In such a case there can be but one opinion. It must be regarded as an anti-christian book, which exhibits great powers misemployed, and which no one can read but at his peril. If the estimate now attempted of its literary value be at all correct, the young and inexperienced student may well spare it from his library. It is not less calculated to vitiate his taste, and to weaken his judgment, than to corrupt his moral and religious principles. A spacious field of historical reading is open to him, in which he may safely expatiate. He will be better employed in qualifying himself to obtain genuine information, than in perusing the "History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire."

## HORÆ LITURGICÆ.

No. XVII.

### THE COLLECTS.

It has been correctly remarked that while no prohibition of short prayers is to be found in the Scriptures, they contain frequent cautions against the indiscreet use of long ones. In drawing near to the throne of grace, we are exhorted by the wisest of men to take heed to the manner of the addresses which we make to that adorable Majesty, and a warning is at the same time conveyed against long and ill considered prayers to the Deity: "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth, therefore let thy words be few."<sup>1</sup>

Our Saviour expressly warns his hearers against those "vain repetitions," included in the long-protracted prayers which it was the practice of the heathen to employ; he reminds them of the Majesty of Him whom they were privileged to address; and encouraging them to a humble dependence upon His kindness and mercy, he assures them that they must not expect to be heard for "their much speaking." In correspondence with these injunctions, when his disciples solicited instruction in this important duty, he furnished them with a form of prayer, the most comprehensive, yet at the same time one of the shortest, that had ever been employed.

We are not, however, to understand that our blessed Lord by any means discouraged the urgency or the frequency of prayer: his own conduct as well as his precepts are explicit enough upon that point; but he sought to correct a prevailing abuse,—to discountenance heathen practices in the performance of this duty,—to produce a more chastened manner of addressing the Deity,—to ensure a more careful and better considered expression of our wants and wishes at the throne of grace. In the words of our judicious Hooker, "the thing which God doth regard is, how virtuous their minds are and not how copious their tongues are in prayer; how well they think, and not how long they talk, who come to present their supplications before Him."

It was no doubt for these reasons, and in conformity with the authority of our Saviour himself, that the compilers of our Liturgy adopted, in the COLLECTS of the Church, those brief yet comprehensive prayers, which, while they are interesting from their variety, are from their shortness best calculated to impress the minds and ensure the attention of the worshippers. They are "brief and well compacted collections of petitions on several subjects, which are, as it were, collected, like a quiver of arrows, into a convenient sheaf or little bundle, ready for use, easily to be received and carried by the understanding, and quickly stored and arranged in the memory."<sup>2</sup> Nor have these short prayers less the sanction of antiquity than of expediency. "The brethren in Egypt," says the venerable Hooker, quoting from St. Augustine, "are reported to have many prayers, but every one of them very short, as if they were darts thrown out with a kind of sudden quickness, lest that vigilant and erect attention of mind which in prayer is very necessary, should be wasted or dulled through continuance, if their prayers were few and long." And in the words of the excellent Dean Comber, "That most of our Collects are very ancient appears by their conformity to the Epistles and Gospels [which they precede], selected by St. Jerome and placed in the Lectionary ascribed to him by many old writers; wherefore many believe the pious and learned St. Jerome first framed them, for the use of the Roman Church, in the time of Pope Damasus, nearly 1500 years ago. Certain it is, that Gelasius who was bishop of Rome about a century later, did range those Collects which were then used into order, and composed some new ones; and that office of his

\* Eccles. v. 2.

† Penny Sunday Reader.

\* From the British Magazine.