

performed in preserving learning; but the fact is, that what Protestants call corruptions of the Christian system, and which they are accustomed to condemn, prevented affairs, when they had become so lamentable, from becoming more hopeless still, and rendered it possible for later ages to make use of the books which the Church had stowed away in monasteries, and which she now claims credit for not destroying, when she ought to have disseminated the knowledge they contained—in which case neither monastic institutions nor a sacred language would have been any use. "There is certainly no adequate excuse," says Hallam, "for keeping the people in ignorance, and the gross corruptions of the Middle Ages are in a great degree assignable to this policy. But learning, and consequently religion, have eventually derived from it the utmost advantage" ("Middle Ages," 462).

The Byzantine Empire, founded by the first Christian Emperor, existed nearly eleven centuries. Of that empire Lecky says: "The universal verdict of history is that it constitutes, with scarcely an exception, the most thoroughly base and despicable form that civilization has yet assumed. Though very cruel and very sensual, there have been times when cruelty assumed more ruthless, and sensuality more extravagant, aspects; but there has been no other enduring civilization so absolutely destitute of all forms and elements of greatness, and none to which the epithet 'mean' may be so emphatically applied. The Byzantine Empire was pre-eminently the age of treachery. Its vices were the vices of men who ceased to be brave without learning to be virtuous. Without patriotism, without the fruition or desire of liberty, after the first paroxysms of religious agitation, without genius or intellectual activity; slaves, and willing slaves, in both their actions and their thoughts, immersed in sensuality and in the most frivolous pleasures, the people only emerged from their listlessness when some theological subtlety, or some rivalry in the chariot races, stimulated them into frantic riots. . . .

"The history of the Empire is a monotonous story of the intrigues of priests, eunuchs, and women, of poisonings, of conspiracies, of uniform ingratitude, of perpetual fratricides. . . . At last the Mohammedan invasion terminated the long decrepitude of the Eastern Empire. Constantinople sank beneath the Crescent, its inhabitants wrangling about theological differences to the very moment of their fall.

"The Asiatic churches had already perished. The Christian faith, planted in the dissolute cities of Asia Minor, had produced many fanatical ascetics and a few illustrious theologians, but it had no renovating effect upon the people at large. . . . The frenzy of pleasure continued unabated, and in a great part of the Empire it seemed, indeed, only to have attained its climax after the triumph of Christianity.

"The condition of the Western Empire was somewhat different. . . . She [the Church] exercised for many centuries an almost absolute empire over the thoughts and actions of mankind, and created a civilization which was permeated in every part with ecclesiastical influence.