

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.*

In the seventh century, our island had almost universally received the Christian religion. But the popish superstitions increased with great rapidity. — The clergy became extremely vicious, through the riches they acquired by persuading people to give them their property, and to go on pilgrimages. In the year 606, Pope Boniface the third, obtained from the Emperor Phocas the title of Universal Bishop. On the death of Augustine, Laurentius succeeded to the see of Canterbury. This holy man, mourning over the sad condition of the English Church, spent a whole night in prayer to God, that he would water it with his Holy Spirit and make it again fruitful. His prayer was answered by the conversion of King Eadwald, who promoted the Gospel by every means in his power. By the faithful labours of Laurentius and his successors Mellitus and Justus, true religion spread amongst the people. Let us imitate the pious example of Bishop Laurentius. Prayer for the effusion of the Holy Spirit upon all ranks and conditions amongst us, will do more for the prosperity and preservation of our Church, than any other means whatever. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee."

The first Saxon king who completely demolished all the idols in his dominions, was Eadbert, King of Kent, who succeeded his father Eadwald, in 640. Popery had by this time made very great progress, and our forefathers mixed much ignorance, superstition, and even idolatry with their profession of the gospel.

In the eighth century, the pope had obtained such power, that he "opposed and exalted himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped." With the power of the pope, the tyranny of the clergy increased. The distinguishing doctrines of the gospel were buried under a mass of superstitious ceremonies; and the pardon of sin was to be purchased at the hands of the priest. To pacify their consciences, men gave their property to the Church, on being assured that there was a state of purgatory, from which they were to be delivered by paying for masses to be said for their souls after they were dead. In this century flourished Willibrod, an eminent English missionary, who became Bishop of Utrecht. After having faithfully discharged his missionary labours on the continent fifty years, he suffered martyrdom in the plains of Doekum, in the ninety fifth year of his age.

The ninth century witnessed a great declension of pure religion in Britain. But Divine Providence raised up the renowned King Alfred, to be a "nursing father" to the English Church. He was the grandson, of King Edmund, who was killed by the Danes for refusing to deny his Saviour. The place of his interment is called this day, St. Edmund Bury, to commemorate his integrity. And scripture warrants us in believing that Christ will also confess him before His Father which is in Heaven. King Alfred seemed to have "feared the Lord from his youth," having early habituated himself to prayer. He was a prodigy of learning, and founded the University College at Oxford. He died in the year 900, and was buried at Hyde Abbey, in Winchester. Towards the end of this century, an English presbyter, named Jeron, suffered martyrdom in Holland, whither he had gone and preached Jesus Christ.

Historians are all agreed, that in the tenth century, scarcely a vestige of true piety could be traced. It was called, "an iron age, barren of all goodness; — a leaden age, abounding in all wickedness." Nothing could exceed the dreadful wickedness of the popes, or the atrocious crimes of the clergy, in this gloomy period of the Church. Yet, in this deplorable state of things, God was pleased to honour our island, by sending two of its natives, named Bernard and Gothebald, as missionaries to Norway; where they successfully preached the pure gospel, which extended itself from thence to the Orkneys, Iceland, and Greenland. When God accompanies our exertions with the effusions of His Spirit, no difficulties need to discourage our labours of love.

The state of religion improved during the eleventh century, in which learning was greatly revived by the monks and other ecclesiastics. This learning was encouraged by William the Conqueror, after he became King of England. That monarch resisted the pope so far as to refuse holding the kingdom as his vassal. "I hold," said he, "my kingdom from none but God and my sword."

Alphage, Archbishop of Canterbury, suffered for a good conscience in 1013. He was stoned to death by the Danes, and seemingly in the spirit of real religion; for like Stephen he prayed for his murderers. Through the influence of Archbishop Anselm, the clergy were forbidden to marry; which unnatural and unscriptural injunction was the fruitful source of the vilest abominations. Anselm himself however, amidst such corruption, held "the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience," as appears by his writings.

In the twelfth century, Oxford became celebrated as the seat of learning. The clergy now boldly claimed exemption from civil jurisdiction, and their right on all occasions to appeal to the pope. To these extravagant pretensions, the usurper Stephen, readily assented. But his successor, Henry the second, resisted them: yet, being enslaved to the popedom, in spiritual affairs he was a great persecutor. About the year 1159, thirty men and women fled to this country from persecution in Germany, but were, by Henry's order, tried for heresy at Oxford; they were condemned to be branded with a hot iron in the forehead, whipped through Oxford, and turned half-naked into open fields, where they perished with hunger and cold! They bore their punishment with patience, and frequently exclaimed, "Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, having violently provoked the king, was assassinated before the altar of St. Benedict's Church, by some persons who were instigated by Henry to murder him. Becket was canonized as a martyr and saint; and miracles being pretended to be performed at his tomb, one hundred thousand credulous persons made pilgrimages to it in one year. Such were the folly and ignorance of the age! The king submitting to the commands of the pope, was ignominiously flogged by the monks before Becket's shrine! In this century, King Richard the first had the absurdity to engage in the crusade to recover the holy land from the Turks, but failed in his object. How heavily the papal yoke was in this age fastened on the neck of England, may easily be conceived from the traitorous conduct of King John, who swore fealty to Pope Innocent the third, and stipulated for himself and successors, to pay an annual tribute to Rome for ever, on pain of forfeiture of the crown.

The thirteenth century began with the persecution of the Waldenses. One million of whom are said to have perished in France, and the Duke of Alva boasted, that he alone destroyed thirty-six thousand of them in the Netherlands. Such was the superstition of the age, that Roger Bacon, our countryman, was accused of magic on account of his extraordinary literary attainments, and was confined a long time in prison for no other crime. The Dominican and Franciscan monks arose about this time, and were in great repute amongst the people, for their supposed superior sanctity. They surrounded the beds of the rich, and, like vultures, tore from the affrighted conscience that wealth, with which it vainly hoped to purchase heaven. And such was the plenitude of the pope's indulgence, that King Henry the third was informed, that if he should chance to murder a priest, he might purchase his pardon.

In the year 1253, died Grosseteste, or Greathead, Bishop of Lincoln, who had the boldness to resist the pope to his face for his venality, and endeavoured to reform the clergy by his preaching and example. — His ideas of religious truth were obscure, but his holy zeal and godly life showed he was under the influence of that Divine Spirit, who gives to every man severally as He will.

In the fourteenth century, both the king and people of England were reduced to a state of almost complete vassalage to the pope; and true religion was scarcely any where to be recognized. Loud complaints were heard through the nation of the enor-

mous abuses of popery, and attempts were made to reform them. The most extraordinary Christian of this century was Thomas Bradwardine, Archbishop of Canterbury, who devoted himself to the study of the holy scriptures, and his writings display the soundness of his doctrines; he may justly be called the "morning star" of the Reformation. About the year 1440, the sublime art of Printing was introduced. — This proved in the hands of Providence, the golden key which opened the iron chest, in which the pope and his satellites had contrived to conceal the holy scriptures for so many ages. — *To be continued.*

RELIGIOUS MISCELLANY.

SKETCHES FROM MEMORY.*

The fearful energies of a north-wester were nearly expended, and the foaming tops of old ocean's mountains were gradually subsiding into a heavy and often dangerous swell; the murky clouds had dispersed, and the horizon became clear; when a British frigate, home-ward bound from India, made the Cape of Good Hope. The hands were turned up to make sail, and very soon the immense masses of canvass which had been snugly stowed during the gale were spread to catch the now light and fitful breeze, in order to steady the ship, which was tumbling about in the trough of the sea. It was whilst the seamen were aloft in the performance of the above frequently most hazardous duty, that a sudden and very violent motion of the ship jerked a fine young man, named Ned Hall, from off the fore-top-sail-yard to the deck below: he fell on the gangway with a horrid crash. Many a hand was stretched forth to raise him; but the skilful and judicious surgeon, who was promptly on the spot, forbade it, preferring to examine hastily the extent of the injuries before he was removed. Brief as was the examination, it was manifest, that although no limbs were broken, yet there was some dreadful internal injury, which left little, if any, hopes of his recovery. He lay, poor fellow, breathing, but perfectly motionless and insensible, and remained so until two days after the accident, when, just as the ship came to an anchor in Table Bay, poor Ned's soul took its flight into the world of spirits.

The circumstance cast a gloom over the whole ship; for Hall was a general favourite — an active and able seaman, bold, reckless, and good natured, and just the man who, if an extra lot of grog was moving, was pretty sure to get a share. It was feared that this had been the case at the time of the shocking occurrence which hurried him into eternity. Be this as it may, he was fearfully unprepared: how could it be otherwise? The ship was without a chaplain, and the public worship of Almighty God was scarcely ever performed. There were very few, I think, — indeed I could not name one for a certainty, — who thought or cared about their souls. In making this assertion, I feel that I do not overstep the bounds of that charity which thinketh no evil.

It was determined that the element which he loved should receive the hull of poor Ned, until the trump of the archangel shall bid the sea give up her dead to stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. It was not allowable to bury in the harbour; consequently it became necessary to take the corpse several miles out to sea, I was the officer appointed to this service. Shrouded in the white hammock which it had so lately been his pride to present each morning neatly lashed up for stowage in the netting, the body was placed on a grating, covered with a union-jack for a pall, and lowered into a cutter, attended by his messmates as mourners, and the captain's clerk to perform the touching and appropriate burial-service of the Church of England over him. The measured stroke of the oars, as we pulled out of the harbour, served for a funeral knell, and an hour's rowing brought us into deep water. The oars were then laid in, and the boat's crew respectfully stood up in their places, with heads bared to the breeze, and countenances on which was depicted serious and manly grief, whilst the service was being read. Precisely as the words "we therefore commit his body to the deep" were uttered,

* Continued from our last number.

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