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Italy,

By Lady Morgan

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(p. 239)

HISTORIC SKETCH.

HISTORIC SKETCH.—*Foundation of Ecclesiastical Government.*—*Gregory the Third.*—*Ecclesiastical Barons.*—*Gregory the Seventh, and Countess Matilda.*—*Progressive Downfall of Papal Tyranny.*—*Events of the Revolution.*—*Restoration and actual Position of the Church.*—*Opposition to Papal Authority in Rome.*—*Antipopes.*—COLA DI RIENZIO.—*Revolution.*—*Death of Basseville.*—SOCIETY.—*Princes, Cardinals, Prelati, Laquais.*—*Press, Literature and Literary Characters.*

WHEN the emperor Tiberius had taken from the Roman people their right of public meetings, and the privilege of electing and deposing their magistrates, —when his barbarous successors broke up that brilliant corps of universal denization which had long associated the talents and co-operation of the known world, Rome, becoming the seat of sanguinary tyranny, ceased to be an object of ambition to her states and dependencies. Each city, as it separated from the empire, formed within itself a civic government, and imitated in its internal administration the institutes of Rome in its republican days; until, finally, in the middle of the fifth century, the very name of an empire faded away, and that city to which the epithet of " *eternal*" was so often given, was yielded up to ruin and desolation, during the successive conquests of the Alarics, the Attilas, and the Odoacres. In the middle of the sixth century, to the classic language and political institutions of antiquity, succeeded the law and dialect of Lombardy. Then first started into palpable existence the ecclesiastical government of Rome, the power of metropolitan bishops, and the influence and domination of a Church Hierarchy. The Cimmerian darkness of those times, called the lower ages, favoured every species of illusion. No recoveries had yet been made of the lost intellect of antiquity; and the anarchy which then prevailed (p. 240) morally and politically has no parallel in any other period of human history<sup>1</sup>. The

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<sup>1</sup> All that is left on record of the feudal days of Italy which preceded her republics, presents the most terrific aspect of a disorganized society. The people were slaves, brutal in intellect and habits; the upper ranks lived in continual warfare with each other; and princes and popes, regulars and seculars, are found stabbing, strangling, blinding, and torturing each other in the short pauses of open warfare. The horrible

sacerdotal power of the Roman augurs was subject to the civil authority, their persons were amenable to the law; and the Christian priests who on the conversion of Constantine succeeded them, were equally dependent on the municipality. But the doctrine that the kingdom of Christ was not of this world, soon became lost in a mass of corruption: an increase of power founded on the ignorance in which society was plunged, was aided by the distance of the Roman see from the seat of government, by the jealousy with which the priesthood guarded the little learning then attainable<sup>2</sup>, and by the (p. 241) heresies which distracted the church and broke up the influence of true Christianity. Then all ages and sexes plunged into the polemical disquisitions on mysteries which escaped beyond the boundary of human reason<sup>3</sup>, and arms were taken in the cause of dogmas, heretical nations were converted at the point of the spear, and nonconformists baptized in blood. Then sanguinary wars were carried on against the sects of the **Samaritans**, the Jews, and the Christians; and the sword drawn in the cause of religious persecution, has never since been sheathed,<sup>4</sup> To these holy horrors of the Lower Empire succeeded the crusades, the

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murders committed in the family of the emperor Maurice by the emperor Phocas were alluded to with approbation by Gregory the Seventh, who (says impartial historians) talked of "*ifdicissimi tempi del regno di Fuca.*" Numbers of the early popes, like the Sultans, succeeded by assassinating their predecessors. Benedict the Sixth was strangled by his successor. The assassinations of Benedict the Ninth procured his abdication. The crimes committed in convents are frankly related by the Italian historians of past and present times—the Muratori and the Pignotti. A young abbot having the eyes of four of his monks trodden out for resisting his despotism, is one among a thousand anecdotes of monastic atrocities.}; Meantime feudal princes in France and Italy were committing every species of violence: living by plunder, and reigning by murder, they sold their prisoners of war as slaves. There was no written law: the ordeal, called in Italy *Giudizio di Dio*, was the only test of innocence; and the accused princess who could not suffer boiling or burning with patience, was declared guilty, and condemned to death. The work of blood went on with such unceasing activity, that to prevent a total depopulation, the *Tregua di Dio* was instituted, which interdicted all combats from Thursday to Monday. This was the result of that ignorance, still protected by the modern representatives of the feudal princes of those good old times.

<sup>2</sup> A layman who should pretend to read was stigmatized as a pedagogue, and regarded as unworthy even to look upon a sword. Kings made a sign of the cross to treaties drawn up by monks; because they could not write. In the ninth century, the Count Palatine, supreme judge of the empire, could not sign his name; and the orthography of the feudal nobles of France was a subject of public jest down to the time of the gallant Richelieu, whose love-letters kept the lawyers in a court of justice "*in a roar.*" Even the inferior clergy were kept in profound ignorance; and Gregory the Second complains by his legates, that such was the ignorance of the Ecumenic Council, that not only letters, but the Scriptures, were unknown to its members. The dog Latin of pope Adrian the Second and his secretary has been the derision of the learned in all times. (See Mabillon.) So far back as the sixth century, open war was declared against enlightening the minds of the laity: and pope Zachariah, urged by the bishop of Magonza, stripped a friar, of the name of Virgilio, of his gown, for having insisted on the doctrine of the antipodes; which, though maintained by *Cicero* and *Macrobius*, was 'condemned by *St. Augustine* as blasphemous and heretical. The people were ordered, on the penalty of incarceration and fines, to disbelieve the doctrine of the antipodes; and they very religiously obeyed. Such are the times whose institutes are to be revived to complete the social order of the present day.

<sup>3</sup> The histories of those times are full of curious anecdotes on this subject. Scholastic divinity was so much the fashion at the courts of the Greek emperors, that Justinian lived in perpetual dispute with his wife Theodora (whom he raised from the stage to the throne) on the validity of a council, the divinity of the word, and the two natures and two wills of Christ. Many generals undertook a siege, or sacked a city, to recover a relic or restore a shrine.- On the taking of Constantinople the emperor John and the empress Anna were found debating in council their meditated attacks on the enemies of—the monks! and when Mahomet the Second with his victorious army was at the gates of the city, the people were all fighting in—a council!

<sup>4</sup> It has been calculated by Voltaire that in the wars called "religious " nine millions seven hundred and eighteen thousand eight hundred persons have perished. The persecutions of the Church were as dreadful in

dragooning in France against Protestants, the penal laws in Ireland against Catholics, and the persecution of the Jews in Germany.

Belisarius and Narses were the last of the military governors of the Greek Empire, who exercised any authority in Rome; and habit rather than power still imposed the shadow of a foreign dominion, when, in the beginning of the eighth century, the famous dispute which gave to Leo Isauricus the epithet of Iconoclastes (the image-breaker), called into visible existence (p. 242) the true power and influence of a body, which had been long secretly and efficiently undermining the throne of the Caesars. The Greek Emperor ordered the destruction of the images in churches, as favouring idolatry. The priesthood and their slaves, the people, openly opposed the decree; and the Pontiff of Rome, aided by his fanatic flock, and by distance from the supreme power, banished the agent of this imperial interference in their Church, and shook off the yoke of a foreign master and a degraded Senate for ever. But the people, unable and unworthy to avail themselves of this chance of independence, did but change their masters; and, instead of recovering their liberty, or resuming their ancient Republican form of government, threw their destiny into the power of the priesthood, and chose for their chief the BISHOP OF ROME. Thus one of the chances which defy the calculation of probabilities, realized for Gregory the Third the visions and the views which so long dazzled the imagination and fostered the ambition of his predecessors. Temporal donations from temporal sovereigns contributed to raise the spiritual power of the Vicegerent of God on earth<sup>5</sup>; and when every crime had its purchaser, from the venial sin bought off by a silver-headed saint, to the mortal iniquity absolved at the price of a church or a kingdom<sup>6</sup>, (p. 243) sources of wealth and power were opened to the head of the Church, which only slowly began to close at the expiration of ages.

The power of the Bishops, and their influence over the people, had long preceded that of the Popes; and long after its establishment, contributed to thwart and to oppose it. The

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their inflictions as in their spirit. Fanaticism, always wresting the scriptures to its own purpose, passed over the evangelic mildness of the New Testament, and sought sanction in the examples of the warrior Israelites. The crusaders quoted and preached the fate of Kabbah, and the manner in which King David carried on his wars against idolaters, putting them "under saws and under axes of iron, and under axes of iron," &c. &c. &c. The ignorant people did not see the absurdity of persecuting the very nation whose example was held out to them as their law.

<sup>5</sup> To bestow a Realm on a Pope was a common act of Royal Sinners. Under King John, England was a fief of Rome; and Innocent the Fourth calls the King of England "*our slave*." See Matthew Paris. The Priesthood, who claimed Scriptural authority for the efficacy of Church offerings, and shewed that all the treasures taken by David from the Philistines, "vessels of gold, vessels of silver, and vessels of brass, were dedicated to the Lord," consented to remit sins, at all prices, from a kingdom to a goose; and offerings were not only made to St. Peter, but to every saint in the Calendar, who had all objects of special protection assigned to them—towns, cities, dogs, pigs, &c. &c.— St. Anthony was the protector of cattle, and a cow offered at his shrine frequently saved a whole drove. St. Vitus was successfully propitiated against a dog-bite, and grew rich as "*the-dog-star raged*." The "*Madonna Incoronata of Foggia* became wealthy by her paid protection of sheep, pigs, and turkeys; and was our *Lady of the Larder*. What were at first voluntary offerings to propitiate heaven, became in time a tribute. Such was the Peter-pence of England, which Gregory the Seventh sent to claim from William the Conqueror. The pence were paid by the people for the benefit of St. Peter; but the king refused the oath demanded with it by Peter's representative. If the people of England are not now voluntarily paying pence to Peter, it is not the fault of those in whose system the ignorance of the people *is* a leading dogma.

<sup>6</sup> Many of the old ecclesiastical territories were held in Italy by deeds of gift, still extant, and all beginning "As a price for my sins and redemption of my soul, I give and bequeath," &c. &c.

Archbishops of Milan frequently disposed of the crown of Lombardy. Other Bishops took arms against their liege Emperor; and almost all the ministers, legates, and ambassadors of the various courts, were Bishops, holding equal influence over the barbarous monarch in whose rude cabinet they ruled, as over the subjects, by whom they were considered as "*the law and the prophets*:"—prelates, statesmen, and warriors, as the exigency demanded, they alternately celebrated a mystery, dictated a law, or girded on their battle-sword, exchanging the mitre for the helmet, and quitting the altar for the field. While at home, they encouraged the art of military architecture, raised citadels, fortified their episcopal towns, and adopting the feudal systems of their barbarous invaders, turned their Dioceses into temporal Seigneuries, and reigned by Baronial jurisdiction, with all its consequences of vassalage!

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**Lady (Sydney) Morgan** (*née* **Owenson**; ca. 1776 – 14 April 1859), was an Irish novelist. Married to Sir Thomas Charles Morgan