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Gregory VII

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THE COLLEGIAN.

GREGORY VII.

THERE are few periods in history which deserve more close and careful study than the times of Gregory the Seventh. Not only are the events which transpired during his life of the most interesting character, in themselves considered, but they are the more attractive, when we reflect that the entire tone of feeling, and most of the remarkable occurrences of the period, were the effect of the energy and perseverance of one man. The biography of Gregory the Seventh, or, rather, of Hildebrand, is indeed the history of his times; for he moulded the age in which he lived after his own fashion, and left his impress indelibly imprinted on every feature of it. He has plainly shown us that it is not pride of birth, or worse, of riches, which bestows true nobility, but that

“The mind createth its own destiny of power;”

and he has practically proved that industry and zeal can raise a man above his fellows, however mean his station or humble his birth may have been.

Hildebrand was born at Soano, in Tuscany, of parents in the lower walks of life, and received the best education which his father could give him. At a period in his youth which has not been ascertained, he entered the monastery of Cluny, near Macon, in France, where his great powers first began to develop themselves. His instructors were not slow to perceive his talents, and to predict that his future course would be a brilliant one. So eloquent was he, that, while at the court of Germany, where he remained a short time, the Emperor, Henry III., said he “had never heard God’s word preached with so much power.” He remained at the court but a short time, however, for it was not congenial to him; and, shortly after his return, he was made Prior of Cluny.

Previous to this, however, amid the silent groves with which his monastery was surrounded, he had formed those plans to the accomplishment of which his after life was devoted. It would far transcend the limits of this sketch to mention the circumstances which induced his contemplations; suffice it to say that, after long and earnest reflection on the state of the church and the world, he adopted the four following ideas, to realize which

he intended to devote the labor of his life. First, that God's church should be *one*, and Rome its efficient head; then, that it should be free; that it should be pure; and that it should command the princes and powers of the earth. And, however startling some of these propositions may seem to us, who live in the light of the nineteenth century, we cannot rashly assert that they were not demanded by the exigences of the times. Still less dare we impute any other than the purest and most disinterested motives to Hildebrand, their originator.

If we trace his future life, we shall see that one or more of these ideas was always the leading motive of his actions. He was not, like the good abbot to whom he communicated the results of his reflections, "content to pray, trust in God, and hope for the best." He knew that some one must *begin* the Herculean task; he felt that a life of action must be his who would change the tone and framework of society.

The first blow was struck when the pious old Bruno was about to ascend the pontifical chair, under the title of Leo the Ninth. This good man, after he had been appointed pope by the emperor, left Worms, of which he was bishop, and commenced his journey to Rome, with all the pomp usually attendant on those of his high dignity. As he was about to pass, on Christmas day, the far-famed monastery of Cluny, its abbot and prior hastened out to meet him, and request that he would spend this great holiday of the church with them. He consented; and while there, the conversation of Hildebrand opened a new world of thought and action to his mind. And when he went forth, it was not in the gorgeous robes and jeweled mitre of the successor of St. Peter; but wearing the plain garb, and bearing the staff of a pilgrim. Attended by the prior of Cluny, he walked to Rome, to ask the confirmation of the people and clergy to the otherwise empty imperial nomination.

Henceforth Hildebrand was his confident and counselor. Under his direction, priests, bishops, and nobles were tried for simony and illegal marriages, and, if found guilty, expelled from office, or excommunicated. When Bruno died, he compelled the emperor to nominate Gebhard as Victor II., and had the election as before made at Rome. He possessed equal power over the succeeding popes, and omitted no occasion to forward the objects for which he lived. By offering to settle a difficulty between Henry of France and Ferdinand of Spain, by the mediation of the pope, he laid the foundation of the supremacy of the Roman see over princes and emperors. To Stephen IX., Nicholas II., and Alexander II. he was chief counselor and director. So completely had he won the affection of the people, and to such an extent had he impressed them with the idea of his energy and power, that, when about to perform the funeral service over the body of Alexander, he was chosen his successor by the unanimous acclamation of the throng which filled St. Peter's. Once seated in the pontifical chair, he was moved neither by flattery, bribes, nor threats. His whole soul was

wrapt in the purpose of accomplishing the four ruling ideas of his life; and he deviated not from the path he had chosen.

His chief contests were with Henry IV. of Germany. At last, when Henry, in the height of his wickedness and folly, demanded that he should descend from the papal chair, which he averred he had usurped, Gregory excommunicated him. The horrors of excommunication were felt by Henry in their full force. He was even deserted by nearly all his adherents. They dared not drink to the king, for "in the clanking of their goblets they heard the re-echoing of the dreaded excommunication." Thus abandoned, he determined to sue for forgiveness. He performed the renowned journey to Canossa on foot, and unattended. The king, and the descendant of kings, climbed the snowy Alps, was lowered in Lombardy by peasants' hands, and waited, bare-headed and bare-footed, three days in the bitter cold to obtain the forgiveness of the carpenter's son.

And when he had obtained it, it availed him nothing. He was not reinstated in his former rights, but, by his humiliation, he had cast off even the few followers that had clung to him. Goaded by such treatment, his character suddenly assumed a new and singular energy. He gathered together what army he could, and, in seven years from his humiliation at Canossa, he entered Rome in triumph.

The noble Gregory was banished. Confined to his stronghold in Salerno, he could look out upon the world, seeming, as yet, unchanged by his labors. His last words are expressive of his disappointed hopes. As he looked from his window over the fields, which were just assuming the verdure of spring, he said, "I have loved justice, and hated iniquity, and I, too, die an exile." His attendants turned to comfort him; but his spirit had departed.

And had he lived in vain? Was the seed he had sown to bring forth no harvest? No. The seed he had scattered had rigorously taken root, although as yet it had not sprung forth. Let us look at the condition of affairs a few years after his death, and we see Henry the Fourth dying of cold and hunger on a door step. The supremacy of Rome was acknowledged, the church was free from simony and marriages of priests—the work of Gregory was accomplished!

Like Gregory must every one labor who would produce great results. Like him he may descend to the grave without seeing the fruit of his toil; but his labors shall succeed like his, if his motives be as pure or his toil as incessant.

THE BREAKERS.

THE breakers of time are the rock-based islands standing in the sea of life. The rapid currents setting in from the icy coasts of disappointment, and the shores of pride, with the storms raised by passion's burning sun,