

**THE HIERARCHICAL DESPOTISM. LECTURES ON  
THE MIXTURE OF CIVIL AND ECCLESIASTICAL  
POWER IN THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE MIDDLE  
AGES. IN ILLUSTRATION OF THE NATURE AND  
PROGRESS OF DESPOTISM IN THE ROMISH  
CHURCH**

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The Hierarchical Despotism. Lectures on the Mixture of Civil and Ecclesiastical Power in the Governments of the Middle Ages. In Illustration of the Nature and Progress of Despotism in the Romish Church by George B. Cheever

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**GEORGE B. CHEEVER**

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IN THE

**GOVERNMENTS OF THE MIDDLE AGES.**

IN ILLUSTRATION OF THE NATURE AND PROGRESS  
OF DESPOTISM IN THE ROMISH CHURCH.

BY

**REV. GEORGE B. CHEEVER.**

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## INTRODUCTION.

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THE following argument has been suggested and called forth by an ingenious lecture of Bishop Hughes on the Mixture of Civil and Ecclesiastical Power in the Governments of the Middle Ages. Under this plausible and captivating title the reader finds a bold, unflinching apology for the Papacy, with the startling proposition that it is to the Despotism of the Papacy in the middle ages that we owe the preservation of Christianity, and the possession of all our civil freedom. I do not give the words, but the amount of his assertions. The lecture was exceedingly able in point of style and scholarship, and mingled with very plausible admissions as to the errors of the Papacy; which circumstances render it so much the more important to put the affirmations of the Lecturer in their true light, and especially to show that the Romish Church, instead of disavowing the union of Church and State, constitutes in herself the very essence of such union. Her HEART in Italy is such a union; the Pope's temporal sovereignty constitutes the left ventricle, his spiritual supremacy the right; and through these two systems pours the life-blood of the Romish Church to the world's extremities.

It is equally necessary to set in their proper light the astounding positions of Bishop Hughes as to the affirmed Republicanism

of Popery, and to show that in all ages the Romish Church has been the enemy both of civil and religious liberty. Whether Bishop Hughes expected to be believed in his singular assertions by any but the members of his own communion we know not; but ours is not the country, nor this the age, when such positions can be assumed for a moment without question. They are so startlingly and sweepingly opposed to all historic truth, that as hearers of Bishop Hughes' lecture, we really felt tempted to question whether he was not playing the satirist with the assumed ignorance and credulity of his audience; whether he was not trying the experiment how far he might enjoy a practical joke on the capacity of their faith in the assertions of the Priesthood. As the very first step in his lecture, he asserted that it was not the genius of the Romish Church to conceal anything of her doctrines or her history! The late freaks enacted with the school-books in this city afford an admirable commentary on this declaration.

The reader will see that the course we have taken in these lectures on such a subject as that announced by Bishop Hughes, is very different from that which we should have pursued had we taken up that subject on its civil rather than its ecclesiastical side. Bishop Hughes having taken his stand-point in the Papacy, we were compelled to take ours there also, and to show that the Papacy, as the example, by eminence, of the Mixture of Civil and Ecclesiastical Power in the Governments of the Middle Ages, was the most perfect and terrific DESPOTISM the world ever saw.



# HIERARCHICAL DESPOTISM.

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## FIRST LECTURE.

### NATURE OF THE ARGUMENT.

IN all speculations on Ecclesiastical History there is no way to criticise correctly, but by placing ourselves first in the light of Christianity at its beginning. We cannot begin with the Fathers, but in the New Testament, in order to a proper judgment of any portion of the history of the Church that has passed since. It is like tracing a mountain torrent from its source in a living rock. You may stand at that source, and follow the stream a little while in its purity. Mark now the rills, as you pass along, that run into it. At first they are small, and much like the original fountain in their clearness. Sometimes there seems to be a silver cascade coming out of the heavens; such seemed at first the fond veneration of the martyrs, and afterwards the cherished remembrance of the Virgin Mary, both of these things to become a torrent of dark idolatry. As you come down from the air of the mountain into the

level world, there are maddy and brawling brooks that pour like rivers into your original stream. Sometimes it spreads out into a wide lake or marsh. Now if, when you put yourself back at any point after these intermixtures have become the body of the stream, you shut yourself up to that scenery, if you judge with the judgment of the inhabitants along its banks, it will seem to you a useful stream, a fertilizing body of water, perfectly suited to the times. But this is not your proper judgment as a Christian. This water where you stand, after all these worldly intermixtures, is not Christianity, but the body of its corruptions. Follow it still onward, and sometimes it flows like the river of Lethe through hell. It leads you where, as in a southern swamp, the trees grow in dripping festoons of impurity, where it is dark at noonday, where below you, the black backs of alligators look like the trunks of trees for you to step upon, and in the branches above you unclean bats and birds of darkness croak and flap their wings to terrify you. Such was the Papacy, the Romish Church, for hundreds of years, with almost all the institutions that grew out of it; the sanctified, consecrated slough and swamp of the world's impurities.

Sometimes this same river, now become a river of death, runs through deep, dark, vast, magnificent caverns; where, when you carry your torches, the roofs are pendent with blazing stalactites, and the walls seem to sparkle with living diamonds. Here, as in a Gothic Cathedral in the dark ages, if you stop and celebrate the mass with the inhabitants, you will think it the most gorgeous imposing ceremony in the world;

you may perhaps speculate on the excellence of that system, which, in a period of such ignorance, could throw so sacred a spell over the mind of the world's congregated multitudes. If you please to forget the calm clear sunlight of your primitive Christianity, you may perhaps say, How holy and how awful is the gloom of religious solemnity diffused over the spirit by this darkness, relieved so sacredly by the blaze of wax tapers and jewelled altars! How great a blessing was the Romish Church at this period to the world! But if you remember the simplicity and noonday clearness of the New Testament faith, you will feel that had it not been for that Romish Church, and its consecration and concentration of the corruptions of Christianity for ages into one system of combined superstition and despotism, the world during those dark ages would have been in the clear sunlight of the gospel, instead of worshipping by torch-light amidst the caverns and petrifications of Popery.

We have a vast subject before us, and I am sure I can trust the candor and intelligence of my audience for a patient investigation of it. I shall begin at the beginning, as certainly you would all wish me to do, and if in tracing the progress of a great despotic universal Hierarchy, such as the mixture of civil and ecclesiastical power must always constitute, from its first threadlike roots in the primitive Church of Christ to its mighty trunk and its overshadowing foliage, I should seem to cut athwart sectarian prejudices, I pray you to believe that it is with a charitable spirit and in the pursuit of truth. In cutting our way to a conclusion we are sometimes unconscious whose brush-wood