

ROME PAPAL, THE RISE AND FALL OF PAPACY

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Rome Papal, the Rise and Fall of Papacy by Robert Fleming

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ROBERT FLEMING

**ROME PAPAL, THE
RISE AND
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ROME PAPAL.

THE
RISE AND FALL
OF
PAPACY.

BY THE
REV. ROBERT FLEMING,
MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL, LONDON.

COMPLETE EDITION,
WITH A
LIFE OF THE AUTHOR.

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1849.



LIFE

OF

THE REV. ROBERT FLEMING, JUN.

As the two eminent individuals who bore the name of Robert Fleming have been often mistaken for one and the same person, we shall briefly state a few particulars respecting the father, before we proceed to the memoir of his son, the author of "The Rise and Fall of Papacy."

Mr Robert Fleming, senior, was born at Yester, in East Lothian, of which parish his father was minister, A.D. 1630. After having received the elements of a liberal and learned education, he studied with a view to the ministry at the Universities of Edinburgh and St Andrews; and in his twenty-third year he was inducted to the charge of the parish of Cambuslang. Here he remained but for a few years; for, in consequence of the passing of the Glasgow Act, he was ejected, along with four hundred of the best ministers of Scotland, who refused to prostrate

the liberties of the Church beneath the feet of civil power. In consequence of this Act, and the persecutions that followed, in which Fleming was a sharer, he found himself compelled to take shelter in London, from which he was afterwards invited to the second pastoral charge of the Scots Church at Rotterdam—a call which he gladly accepted. In this place he discharged the duties of a faithful, able, and zealous minister, and also wrote several distinguished works, the chief of which, entitled “The Fulfilling of the Scripture,” was highly prized by our fathers, and frequently referred to by the most eminent theological writers at the close of the seventeenth and a great portion of the eighteenth century. He also occasionally repaired to London, after the accession of William III., where his learning and piety insured him an affectionate welcome from the most eminent in the religious world. It was in one of these visits in 1694 that he was attacked with his last illness, and, after a short struggle, he expired at the age of sixty-four.

The exact period of the birth of Robert Fleming, junior, author of the following work, cannot now be ascertained. It appears, however, that he was born at Cambuslang, during the short incumbency of his father there; and that on the ejection of the latter, Robert, who must still have been in mere boyhood, if not absolute infancy, composed one of a young family of seven children, who were thus bereaved of paternal care, and thrown upon the wide world. But that gracious and heavenly Father for whose cause all this destitution had been incurred, did not suffer them to want, but, on the contrary, provided them with every comfort that was fitting for them. On the settlement of their parent in Holland,

Robert and the rest of the family, who some time previous had been deprived of their mother by death, repaired to Rotterdam.

Whatever education Robert had received before this period must have been of a desultory character, and liable to many interruptions; but in a mind of such an active and inquiring disposition, it generally happens that such obstacles, so far from impeding, only nerve for stronger and more successful efforts. After having been again settled under paternal superintendence, he continued his studies with redoubled ardour, and with the purpose of devoting them to the work of the ministry. Of his diligence, indeed, in preliminary studies, and the proficiency he made in classical and Biblical learning, there are ample proofs, not only in the general tenor of his after-life, but the writings he bequeathed to posterity. Of the solemn view which he took of the responsibility of the ministerial work, and the nature of the preparation required for it, he has given us a copious and interesting account, in the preface to his learned work entitled "Christology." "When I had passed," he says, "the ordinary course of school and academical studies, and had resolved to devote my life wholly to the study of divinity, with the joint approbation of my friends and teachers, I thought it my duty to bind myself by a solemn resolution before God to prosecute that sacred work with the utmost intention of mind, divesting myself as far as possibly I could from all prejudices arising either from education, party, or interest. And I have reason to thank God that (while I was very young) my overhearing my father solemnly declare to some particular friends that he had all along acted thus, did leave

such an impression on my mind, that I took up this resolution very early, though not so solemnly as afterwards, when time and experience had further ripened and improved my reason."

The resolution thus adopted, Fleming pursued with extraordinary diligence, both at the University of Leyden and that of Utrecht. His fellow-students were content to use the lectures of the professors, and digest compends of theology; he, on the contrary, procured the books that had been written both for and against controverted points and cases. He would not decide without hearing both sides of the question, and in their own words. This bold experiment, however, was not without its disadvantages. "I must own," he says, "that I was frequently nonplussed, and rendered pendulous and doubtful what to think and believe in several cases. I lamented my own weakness, and want of acuteness and penetration, in comparison of others who were as confident in their opinion of the most difficult things as if they had been the most facile." He comforted himself, however, in the thought, that by the wider range of study which he had adopted, he had learned more thoroughly the sentiments of those who differed in opinion from himself, and had acquired towards them a more enlarged charity. After having thus studied the controversies of the day, he turned to the classical writers, the philosophers of the Heathen world, and the fathers of the Christian Church. These he examined successively with great diligence and care; and perceiving that the Patristic writings did not depend wholly upon the Scriptures for illustration, but reverted often to traditional sources, he fell back upon the Jewish and

Rabbinical literature, that he might verify them at the fountain-head. Thus having plodded through the whole round of literature and scholastic theology, with a reference to its highest and most legitimate application; having weighed its worth, and ascertained its tendencies; and having, above all, imbibed that spirit of love and charity which he was so desirous to cultivate, he finally returned with redoubled affection to that source of light and wisdom in which alone the inquiring soul can be at rest, and the most capacious intellect be filled to overflowing. His language on this subject is full of interest and meaning: "But when I had taken all this pains, and run round in this mental survey of learning, I began not only to tire and grow uneasy, but disrelish, and in some sort nauseate, all human writings. I found that there was no end in reading as well as in writing books, and that much study was a weariness to the flesh—nay, that vanity and vexation of spirit were themselves entailed upon this, as well as upon all other things that the children of Adam busied themselves about. I resolved, therefore, to betake myself for the future to the study of the Sacred Volume alone, as my main business, and to make no other use of other books than as they might become subservient to me in the understanding and improvement of the same. For I may say truly, with David, that I easily see the end of all human perfection, but that the law of God was exceeding broad, as appearing still greater and greater the more it was searched into and understood."

After Fleming had thus studied and investigated, and finally returned exclusively to the Source of all light and charity, he was privately ordained in Rotter-

dam, but without being set apart over any particular charge, in 1688, by several ministers of the Church of Scotland, at that time refugees in Holland. He soon after repaired to England as domestic chaplain to a private family, where he remained about four years, still cultivating assiduously his theological studies; and there, also, he published several poetical productions, which have shared the fate of many of their contemporaries, being now rarely found, and seldom or never adverted to. At length, on having once more visited Holland, he received, in 1692, an invitation from the English Presbyterian Church at Leyden, to become their minister; with which he complied. Here he became so highly endeared to his people, that when, in consequence of the death of his excellent father in 1694, he was invited by the Presbyterian Church at Rotterdam to succeed their deceased pastor, his own congregation earnestly deprecated his removal. Much and earnest remonstrance between the two churches was the consequence, so that he was not admitted to the charge at Rotterdam until the commencement of the following year. To console his afflicted flock at Leyden, he promised to them, at his departure, to return and preach frequently among them, and also to dispense the sacrament to them every quarter—a promise which he sacredly fulfilled, until the settlement of a regular minister there made his further labours unnecessary.

It might have been expected that a translation effected with so much difficulty and reluctance would have precluded the pain of a second, and that Fleming would have been suffered to remain in the highly important charge which he held at Rotterdam; but such did not