

**HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN
CHURCH FROM THE ASCENSION
OF JESUS
CHRIST TO THE CONVERSION OF
CONSTANTINE. THE NINTH EDITION**

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History of the Christian Church from the Ascension of Jesus Christ to the Conversion of
Constantine. The Ninth Edition by Edward Burton

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EDWARD BURTON

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HISTORY
OF THE
CHRISTIAN CHURCH,
FROM
THE ASCENSION OF JESUS CHRIST
TO THE
CONVERSION OF CONSTANTINE.

BY THE LATE
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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Committee of General Literature and Education feel a melancholy satisfaction in offering this Volume to the Public. Its able and lamented Author, among the last acts of his life, had furnished the entire manuscript for the press; and it was within a few weeks only of publication, when it pleased God to call him from his various and successful labours to his rest. These pages, with many others, will remain valued monuments of his great learning, the soundness of his faith, and his true Christian charity.

HISTORY

OF THE

CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

INTRODUCTION.

THE reader of history may be compared to a traveller, who leaves his own country, to visit others which are far off, and very different from that in which he has been living. The manners and customs of the nations which he is going to see, are either wholly new to him, or he is already in some measure acquainted with them, by the information and researches of others. So it is with the reader of history. He is either beginning a study, to which he was altogether a stranger, and meets, for the first time, with facts and circumstances of which he had never heard before, or he is partly retracing his own steps, and filling up the details of a plan which had been exhibited to him previously in outline. It is, perhaps, difficult to say in which of the two cases his gratification and amusement will be greatest; and the minds of different readers will be differently affected, according to the degree of knowledge already possessed upon the subject which they are reading.

It must not, however, be forgotten, that gratification and amusement are not the only results which the history of past events produces on the mind. Many persons, it is true, are fond of history, and study it

with avidity, without its enabling them to confer any direct practical benefit on mankind. Others, also, as is the case with children, are set to read the histories of different countries, though it is not expected that much moral improvement should be derived from such lessons. But, even in these cases, the study of history has its own peculiar benefits. The mere recollection of facts and dates is found to be of great service to the mind, as soil is improved by being frequently turned over with the spade, though it is not constantly bearing a fresh crop. History is thus an indispensable instrument in the culture of the memory; and, though few persons retain, in after life, the minute details of history or chronology which they learned in their childhood, it might be difficult to point out any one of their mental faculties which had not been rendered more acute, and more fit for its peculiar application, by this early exercise of the memory.

Nor can history be said to be without its use, though it does not enable all its readers to confer any direct practical benefit on mankind. To measure the advantage of all knowledge by its practical utility would be as absurd as to require all persons to be of the same height, or to expect every production of the animal and vegetable kingdoms to be useful for the same purpose. The great distinction between man in a savage and in a civilized state is, that the savage seeks for nothing but what is useful, whereas the civilized member of society seeks for moral and intellectual enjoyment. The reader of history is therefore benefited, and is able to extend the benefit to others, if his reading supplies him with the means of making himself and others better and happier than they were. That the study of history will enable him to do this, requires no demon-

stration; and it would not be difficult to show, that the great end and object of this study is to improve the moral condition, and to increase the happiness, of mankind.

There is, undoubtedly, a nearer and more apparent utility, which results from an acquaintance with the events of former ages. If History has been correctly described to be "Philosophy teaching by example," it becomes at once the necessary study of all those who are concerned in the government of states. To disregard the examples of past times is imprudent in all persons, but in those who are engaged in governing others, it is positively culpable; and for a statesman to be ignorant of history, which supplies him with practical experience in the department which he has chosen to follow, must be attended with the same consequences to himself and others, as if a tradesman or a mechanic should undertake to serve his employers without a knowledge of his goods or of his tools. But, though the past history of his own, or other countries, may supply the statesman with many useful lessons, and he may thus be better able to carry on the government, he has gained but a small portion of experience, if he has merely treasured up a certain number of facts which may serve as a guide to his own conduct under similar circumstances. The lesson which he is to read in the page of history, is the art of making men happy, by making them good. He must observe, in the events of past ages, how *righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people*: and he who reads history without constantly remembering, that the persons of whom he has been reading will be judged hereafter for those very actions which he has been admiring or condemning, is likely to mislead both himself and

others, when he comes to apply his historical experience to practice.

If these remarks are true with respect to all history, they must be more especially so when applied to the study of the History of the Church. Every history is more or less employed in detailing the different forms which religion has assumed, and the conduct of persons acting under religious impressions; and every reader may derive instruction from the facts of this nature which are contained in the records of past ages: but the History of the Church is the history of truth; it describes to us the progress of a religion which, undoubtedly, came from heaven, and which is, undoubtedly, the only religion by which we can hope to go to heaven. This at once gives to the History of the Church an interest and importance above every other study. It represents to us human beings, actuated by human motives and passions, and indulging freely in the speculations of their own reason; but their actions are recorded as connected with the belief of certain doctrines, which God himself has commanded us to receive as true. Though mixing with the world, and taking part in the common occurrences of life, they are exhibited by the ecclesiastical historian under one aspect only—that of believers in Christianity: whatever other part they may have played in the great drama of events which have marked the last eighteen centuries, we are not concerned in noticing it, except so far as their conduct produced an effect upon the interests of religion. Whatever has advanced the cause of the Gospel, and whatever has retarded it, come naturally within the province of the ecclesiastical historian; and, being properly concerned with spiritual, rather than temporal, matters,—with things relating to the soul, rather than

to the body,—it might be thought that he would be spared the contemplation of those painful scenes, which have almost reduced the business of an historian to a record of misery and crime.

Unfortunately, the annals of the Church, like those of civil and political transactions, remind us too plainly of what was remarked above, that the actors have been human beings. If anything could deter a believer in revelation from composing a History of the Christian Church, it would be his unwillingness to disclose to the world the succession of miseries which, in one sense, may be traced to religion as their cause. He would wish to throw a veil over those dismal periods when ignorance and superstition combined to make men slaves to error, or when all the worst passions of the heart appeared to be let loose in polemical warfare. But we have no reason to think that the Almighty Disposer of events, who allowed these impurities to defile his Church, intended the record of them to be lost. That he had wise reasons for allowing them to take place, cannot be doubted; but even our limited faculties can see, that a faithful description of such misfortunes may serve as a merciful warning to those who are to come after. It is therefore particularly wished that the reader should be prepared, beforehand, for meeting with narrations of this kind. He will find that Christians have not only been hypocrites and fanatics—deceivers and deceived—supporters of false doctrines, and haters of those who differed from themselves—but that they have carried their mischievous and perverted principles into practice; have appealed to the sword, as the arbiter of religious differences; and have caused torrents of blood to be shed in supporting, as they would say, the cause of the Gospel of peace.