

**THE CONVERSION OF THE
ROMAN EMPIRE:
THE BOYLE LECTURES
FOR THE YEAR 1864**

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The Conversion of the Roman Empire: The Boyle Lectures for the Year 1864 by Charles Merivale

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CHARLES MERIVALE

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THE CONVERSION
OR
THE ROMAN EMPIRE.

LECTURE V. (Page 102.)

THE HEATHEN AWAKENED TO A SENSE OF HIS SPIRITUAL DANGER.

1 JOHN IV. 21.

And this commandment have we from Him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

LECTURE VI. (Page 128.)

EFFORTS OF THE HEATHEN TO AVERT SPIRITUAL RUIN.

ST. MARK IX. 24.

And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.

LECTURE VII. (Page 147.)

THE DOCTRINES OF CHRISTIANITY RESPOND TO THE QUESTIONS OF THE HEATHENS.

ST. MATTHEW XXVIII. 19.

The name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

LECTURE VIII. (Page 167.)

THE GODLY EXAMPLE OF THE CHRISTIANS COMPLETES THE CONVERSION OF THE EMPIRE.

ACTS XVII. 6.

These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also.

P R E F A C E .

THE conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity is a very comprehensive subject of inquiry. It is a subject not for a dissertation but for a history, for it involves a progressive change extending over three or more centuries, and is marked by a series not only of moral and intellectual, but of political revolutions. It embraces a multitude of events, and presents to us a long gallery of individual characters. It points backward to the origin and progress of thought and feeling on religious questions ; and forward almost to the farthest expansion that they have hitherto attained. It is in itself the history of religion brought into one focus, for there is little probably in the later course of human speculation on the most interesting of all questions, of which the germ and often the full development may not be traced in

the controversies of primitive Christianity with Paganism. In undertaking to give a sketch of this subject within the limits of eight lectures delivered from a pulpit to a mixed and fluctuating congregation, I have not supposed that I could do more than indicate a few of its most salient points, and suggest topics of reflection and possibly of inquiry that might lead some of my hearers or readers to a further and more fruitful consideration of it. With this view, in printing these Lectures according to the terms of the foundation on which they were delivered, I have appended to them some explanatory and illustrative notes which seemed to be required for the better understanding of my remarks; but still the volume which I lay before the reader does not pretend to be a formal disquisition on the subject—still less, I need hardly say, to be a history of the great transformation of opinion of which it treats.

It may be well to observe, however, that the conversion of the Empire seems, under God's providence, to have been affected principally in four ways:—

1. By the force of the external evidence to the

truth of Christianity, that is, by the apparent fulfilment of recorded prophecy, and by the historical testimony to the miracles by which it claims on its first promulgation to have been accompanied.

The age indeed was uncritical, and little competent to weigh such external testimony with the accuracy which is now demanded. There was great proneness to accept the claim of miracles; but at the same time, and in consequence of this very proneness, very little weight was attached to it as an argument of Divine power. Great stress was laid on the fulfilment of prophecy, but in this respect also the age was liable to be grossly imposed upon; and it must be allowed that the preaching of Christianity owes some portion, however trifling, of its success to the false pretensions of the so-called Sibylline Oracles, which form no part of its genuine credentials.

On these accounts, and because a discussion on this branch of the subject would have been ill suited to discourses from the pulpit, I have refrained from dwelling upon the effect of the ex-

ternal evidence of Christianity in the conversion of the Empire.

2. By internal evidence, from the sense of spiritual destitution, the consciousness of sin, the acknowledged need of a sanctifier and a redeemer.

This in the primitive, as in later ages, was undoubtedly the most effectual testimony to the Truth in Christ Jesus. It appeals to all men without distinction of class and nation. But it addresses itself more especially to men of intelligence and moral sensibility. It is the highest and the worthiest testimony, the most distinctive of the true religion, the most foreign to the character of the false religions of the heathen, yet bearing a mysterious affinity to some of the highest and worthiest aspirations of the heathen philosophy. It addresses itself with equal power to mankind in all ages, and establishes most vividly, by its applicability to ourselves, the moral connection which subsists between the men of the first century and the men of the nineteenth.

This is the branch of Christian evidences on