

**A HISTORY
OF THE PROTESTANT
REFORMATION**

LETTER FIVE



By William Cobbett

1825

**A HISTORY
OF THE
PROTESTANT "REFORMATION"
IN
ENGLAND AND IRELAND**

**Showing how that event has impoverished and degraded
the main
body of the People in those Countries**

IN A SERIES OF LETTERS

Addressed to all sensible and just Englishmen

BY WILLIAM COBBETT.

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**A HISTORY
OF THE
PROTESTANT REFORMATION
LETTER V**

**AUTHORITIES RELATING TO THE EFFECTS OF THE MONASTIC
INSTITUTIONS.
THEIR GREAT UTILITY, AND THE POLITICAL WISDOM IN WHICH
THEY WERE FOUNDED.
THE APPOINTMENT OF THE RUFFIAN THOMAS CROMWELL. HIS
PROCEEDINGS, IN THE WORK OF PLUNDER AND DEVASTATION,
THE FIRST ACT OF PARLIAMENT AUTHORISING THE PLUNDER**

By William Cobbett

Kensington, 31st March, 1825

My FRIENDS,

136. When, at the close of the foregoing Letter, I appeared to content myself with the authority of the Protestant Bishop, Tanner, as a defender of Monastic institutions against the attacks, the malignant lies of Hume, had in reserve other authorities in abundance, some of which I should then have cited, if I had had room. Bishop Tanner goes, indeed, quite home to every point; but, the matter is of such great importance, when we are about to shew the destruction of these institutions; that, out of fifty authorities that I might refer to, I will select four or five, will take one Foreign and four English; and, observe, they are all Protestor authorities.

137. *Mallet. History of the Swiss*, Vol. I. p. II. "The monks softened by their instructions and ferocious manners of the people, and opposed their credit to the tyranny of the nobility, who knew no other occupation than war, and grievously oppressed their neighbours. This account of the government of Monks was preferred to theirs. The people sought them for Judges. It was usual saying, that it was better to be governed by the Bishop's crosier than the Monarch's sceptre."

138. *Drake. Literary Hours*, Vol. II. p. 435. Monks of Cassias, observes Wharton, were distinguished not only for their knowledge of sciences, but the attention to polite learning, and an acquaintance with the Classics. Their learned Abbot Desiderius collected the best Greek and Roman authors. The fraternity not only composed learned treatises on Music, and on Astronomy, and the Vitruvian Architecture, but likewise employed a portion of their time in transcribing Tacitus &c. This laudable example was, in the 11th and 12th centuries, followed with great spirit and emulation by many English monasteries.

139. Turner. *History of England*, Vol. II. P. 360 and 361. "No Tyranny was ever established that was more unequivocally the creature of popular will, and longer maintained by popular support; in no point did personal interest and public welfare more cordially unite than in the encouragement of Monasteries.

140. *BATES Rural Philosophy*, p. 322. "It is to be lamented, that, while the Papist are Industriously planting nunneries and other religious Societies in the Kingdom, some good Protestants are not so far excited to imitate their example, as to form establishments for the education and protection of young women of serious disposition, or who are otherwise unprovided, where they might enjoy at least a temporary refuge, be instructed in the principles of religion, and in all such useful and domestic arts, as might qualify them, who, were inclined to return into the world, for a pious and laudable discharge of the duties of common life. Thus might the comfort and welfare of many individuals be promoted to the great benefit of society at large, and the interests of Popery, by improving on its own principles, be considerably counteracted.

141. *Quarterly Review*. December 1811. "The world has never been so indebted to any other body of men as to the illustrious order of Benedictine Monks; but historians, in relating the evil of which they were the occasion, too frequently forget the good which they produced. Even the commonest readers are acquainted with the arch miracle-monger, St. Dunstan, whilst the most learned of our countrymen scarcely remember the name of those admirable men, who went forth from England, and became the Apostles of the North. Tinian and Juan Fernandez are not more beautiful spots on the Ocean than Malmesbury, Lindisfarne and Jarrow were in the ages of our heptarchy. A community of pious men, devoted to literature and to the useful arts as well as to religions, poems, in those days, like a green Oasis amid the desert. Like stars on a moonless night, they shine upon us with a tranquil-ray. If ever there was a man, who could truly be called venerable, it was he, to whom the appellation was constantly fixed, **BEDE**, whose life was passed in instructing his own generation, and preparing records for posterity. In those days, the Church offered the only asylum from the evils to which every country was exposed amidst continual wars, the Church enjoyed peace it was regarded as a sacred realm by men who, though they hated one another, believed and feared the same God. Abused as it was by the worldly-minded and ambitious, and disgraced by the artifices of the designing and the follies of the fanatic, it afforded a shelter to those who were better than the world in their youth, and weary of it in their age. The wise as well as the gentle fled to this Goshen of God, which enjoyed its own light and calm, amidst darkness and storms.

142. This is a very elegant passage; but, as Turner's Protestantism impels him to apply the term "tyranny" to that which honest feeling bids him say was the creature of the popular will, and was produced and upheld a cordial union of personal interest and public welfare, so the Protestantism of the Reviewers leads them to talk about "evil" occasioned by an Order, to whom the world is more indebted than to any other body of men; and it also leads them to repeat the hacknied charge Against St. Dunstan, forgetting, I dare say, that he is one of the Saints in our Protestant Church Calendar! However, here is more than enough to serve as an answer to the whole, herd of writers, who have put forth their venom against the Monastic Orders.

143. Can we refer to these authorities, can we see all the indubitable proofs of the real Christian charity, and benevolence, which were essentially are connected with the religion of our forefathers, without feeling indignation against those, who, from our infancy to our manhood, have been labouring, to persuade us, that the Catholic church produced selfishness, hardness of heart, greediness in this clergy, and particularly a want of feeling for the poor? Undeniable as is the fact, that the "Reformation" robbed the poor of their patrimony; clear as we shall, by-and-by, see the proofs of its power in creating paupers, and in taking it from the higher all compassion for the lower classes, how incessant have been the efforts, how crafty the schemes, it make us believe precisely the contrary! If the salvation of their own souls had been the object they had in view, the Receivers could not have laboured with more pains and Anxiety. They have

particularly bent their attention to the implanting of their falsehoods in the minds of children. The press has teemed, for two centuries and more, with cheap books having this object principally in view. Of one instance of this sort I cannot refrain from making particular mention; namely, a Fable, in a Spelling Book, by one FENNING, which has been in use in England for more than half a century. The fable is called "*The priest and the jester.*" A man, as the fable says, went to a Romish Priest, and asked charity of him. He began by asking for a guinea, but lowered the sum till it came to a farthing and still the priest refused. Then the beggar asked for a blessing, which the priest readily consented to give him: "No," said the beggar; "if it were worth but one single farthing you would not give it me," How indefatigable must have been these deceivers, when they could resort to means like these! What multitudes of children, how many millions of people have, by this book alone, had falsehood the most base and wicked engraven upon their minds!

144. To proceed now with our inquiry relative to the effects of the Monastic Institutions, we may observe, that authorities, in this case, seemed necessary. The lies were of long-standing: hypocritical selfishness, backed by every species, of violence, tyranny and cruelty; had been at work for ages to delude the people of England. Those who have fattened upon the spoils of the church and the poor, who wished still to enjoy the fatness in quiet, naturally laboured to persuade the people, that those who had been despoiled were unworthy people; that the institutions, that gave them so much property, were, at least, useless; that the possessors were lazy, ignorant, and base creatures spreading darkness over the country instead of light; devouring that which ought to have sustained worthy persons. When the whole press and all the pulpits of a count are leagued for such a purpose, and supported in that purpose by the State; and when the reviled party is, by then hardly to be described, reduced to silence; in such a case, the assailants must prevail; the mass of the people must believe what they say. Reason, in such a state of things, is out of the question. But, truth is immortal; and though she may be silenced for a while, there always, at last, comes something to cause her to claim her due and to take triumph over falsehood.

145. There is now come that which is calculated to give our reasoning faculties fair play. We see the land covered at last, with pauperism, fanaticism and crime. We hear an increase of the people talked of as a calamity; we hear of projects to check the breeding of the people; we hear of Scotch "feelosofers" prowling about the country, reading lectures to the manufacturers and artisans to instruct them in the science of preventing their wives from being mothers; and, in one instance, this has been pushed so far as to describe, in print, the mechanical process for effecting this object! In short, we are now arrived at a point which compels us to inquire into the cause of this monstrous state, of things. The immediate cause we find to be the poverty and aggrandisement of the main body of the people; and these many stages, we trace back to the "Reformation," and of the effects of which was to destroy those Monastic institutions, which, as we shall now see, retained the produce of labour in the proper places, and distributed it in a way naturally tending to make the lives of the people easy and happy.

146. The authorities that I have cited ought to be of great weight in the question; but, supposing there to be authorities on the side of these institutions, of what more do they stand in need than the unfettered exercise of our reason? Reason, in such a case, is still better than authorities; but who is to resist both? Let us ask, then, whether reason do not reject with disdain the slander that has been heaped on the monastic institutions. They nourished in England for nine hundred years, they were beloved by the people; they were destroyed by violence, by the plunderer's grasp, and the murderer's knife. Was there ever any thing so vicious in itself, or evil in its effects, held in veneration by a whole people for so long a time? Even in our own times we see the people of Spain rising in defence of their monasteries; and we hear the Scotch "feelosofers" abuse them, because they do not like to see the property of those monasteries transferred to English Jews.

147. If the Monasteries had been the cause of evil, would they have been protected with such care by so many wise and virtuous kings, legislators, and judges? Perhaps Alfred was the greatest man that ever lived. What writer of eminence, whether poet, lawyer, or historian, had not selected him as the object of his highest praises? As king, as soldier, as patriot, as lawgiver in all his

character, he is, by all, regarded as having been the greatest, wisest, most virtuous of men. And is it reasonable, then, for us suppose, that he, whose whole soul was wrapped up in the hope of making his people free, honest, virtuous and happy. Is it reasonable to suppose, that he would have been, as was, one of the most munificent founders of Monasteries, if those institutions had been vicious in themselves, or tended to evil? We have not these institutions and the effects immediately before our eyes. We do not actually see the Monasteries. But we know of them two things; namely, that they were most anxiously cherished by **ALFRED** and his tutor, **SAINT SWITHIN**; and that they were destroyed by the bloody tyrant, Henry the Eighth, and the not less bloody ruffian, **THOMAS CROMWELL**. Upon these two facts alone we might pretty safely decide on the merits of these institutions.

148. And what answer do we ever obtain to this argument? Mr. **MERVYN ARCHDALL**, in the Preface to *History of the Irish Monasteries*, says: When we contemplate the universality of that religious zeal which drew thousands from the elegance and comforts of society to sequestered solitude and austere maceration; when we behold the greatest and wisest of mankind the dupes of fatal delusion, and even the miser expending his store to partake in the felicity of mortified ascetics: again, when we find the tide of enthusiasm subsided, and sober reason recovered from her delirium, and endeavouring, as it were, to demolish every vestige of her former frenzy, we have a concise sketch of the history of Monarchism, and no common instance of that mental weakness and versatility which stamp the character of frailty on the human species. We investigate these phenomena in the moral world with a pride arising from assumed superiority in intellectual powers, or higher degrees of civilization our vanity and pursuit are kept alive by a comparison so decidedly in favour of modern times. Indeed Mr. **ARCHDALL**! And where are we to look for the proof or signs of this assumed superiority; this comparison so decidedly in favour of modern times? Are we to find them in the ruins of those noble edifices, of the plunder and demolition of which you give us an account? Are we to find them in the total absence of even an attempt to ornament your country with any thing to equal them in grandeur or in taste? Are we to look for this "superiority" in the numerous tithe-battles, pistol in hand, like that of **SKIBBEREEN**? Are modern times proved to be decidedly superior to former times by the law that shuts Irishmen up in their houses from sunset to sunrise Are the people living upon pig-diet, their nakedness, their hunger, their dying by hundreds from starvation, while their ports were crowded with ships carrying provisions from their shores, and while an army was fed in the country, the business of which army was to keep the starving people quiet: are these amongst the facts on which you found your comparison so decidedly in favour of modern times? What then, do you look with "**PRIDE**" to the ball at the Opera-House, for the relief of the starving people of Ireland, the **BALL-room DECORATED** with a transparency exhibiting an Irishman, as large as life, **EXPIRING FROM HUNGER**? And do you call the greatest and wisest of mankind dupes; do you call them the dupes of a fatal delusion when they founded institutions which rendered a thought of Opera-house relief impossible? Look at the present, wretched and horrible state of your country; then look again at your list of ruins; and then (for you are a church-parson, I see,) you will, I have no doubt, say, that, though the former have evidently come from, the latter; it was a sober reason, and not thirst for plunder, that produced these ruins and that it was from frenzy and and mental weakness in the greatest and, wisest of mankind that have produced the foundations of which those ruins are the melancholy memorials.

149. The hospitality and other good things proceeding from the Monasteries, as mentioned by the Protestant **BISHOP TANNER**, are not to be forgotten; but we must take a closer view of the subject, in order to do full justice to these calumniated institutions. It is our duty to show, that they were founded in great political wisdom, as well as in real piety and charity. That they were not, as the false and malignant and selfish **HUME** has described them, mere dolers out of bread and meat and beer; but that they were, great diffusers of general prosperity, happiness and content; and that one of their natural and necessary effects was, to prevent that state of things which sees but two classes of people in a community, masters and slaves, a very few enjoying the extreme of luxury, and millions doomed to the extreme of misery.

150. From the land all the good things come. Somebody must own the land. Those who own it must have the distribution of its revenues. If these revenues be chiefly distributed amongst the people, from whose labour they arise, and in such a way as to afford to them a good maintenance on easy terms, the community must be happy. If the revenues be alienated in very great part; if they be carried away to a great distance, and expended amongst those, from whose labour no part of them arise, the main body of the community must be miserable: poor-houses, jails, and barracks must arise. Now, one of the greatest advantages attending the Monasteries, was, that they of necessity, caused the revenues of a large part of the land of the country to be, spent on the, spot whence those revenues, arose. The hospitals and all the other establishments of the kind had the same tendency. There were, of the whole, great and small, not less, on an average, than fifty in each county; so that the revenues of the land, diffused themselves, in great part, immediately amongst the people, at large. We all well know how the state, of a pariah become instantly changed for the worse, when a noble or other great landowner quits the mansion, in it, and leaves that mansion shut up. Every one knows the effect which such a shutting up has upon the poor-rates of a parish. It is notorious that the non-residence of the Clergy and of the noblemen; and gentlemen is universally complained of as a source of evil to the country. One of the arguments, and a great one that is, in favour of severe game laws, is, that the game causes noblemen and gentlemen to reside. What, then, must have been the effect of twenty rich Monasteries in every county, expending constantly a large part of their incomes on the spot? The great cause of the miseries of Ireland, at this moment, is absenteeism that is to say, the absence of the land-owners, who draw away the revenues of the country, and expend them in other countries. If Ireland had still her seven or eight hundred Monastic institutions, great and small, she would be, as she formerly was, prosperous and happy. There would be no periodical famines and typhus fevers; no, need of sun-set and sun-rise laws for Captain Rocks; no projects for preventing the people from increasing no schemes for getting rid of a surplus population; none of that poverty and degradation that threaten to make a desert of the country, or to make it the means of destroying the greatness of England herself,

151. Somebody, must own the lands and the must be whether it be better for them to be owned by those who constantly, and constantly must live, in the country and live in the midst of their estates; or, by those who always may and who frequently will and do, live at a great distance from their lands, and draw away the revenues of them to be spent elsewhere. The monastics are, by many, called drones. **BISHOP TANNER** has shown us, that this charge is very false. But, if it were true, is not a drone in a cowl as good as a drone in a hat and top-boots? By drones, are meant those who do not work; and, do land-owners usually work? The lay land-owner and his family spend more of their revenues in a way not useful to the people than the monastics possibly could. But, besides this, besides the hospitality and charity of the monastics, and besides, moreover, the lien, the legal lien, which the main body of the people had, in many cases, to a share, directly or indirectly, in the revenues of the Monasteries, we are to look at the monks and nuns in the very important capacity of landlords and landladies. All historians, however Protestant or malignant, agree, that they were easy landlords; that they let their lands at low rents, and on leases of long term of years; so that, says even **HUME**, the farmers regarded themselves as a species of proprietors, always taking care to renew their leases before they expired. And, was there no good in a class of landlords of this sort? Did not they naturally and necessarily create, by slow degrees, men of property? Did they not thus cause a class of yeomen to exist, real yeomen, independent of the aristocracy? And was not this class destroyed by the "Reformation", which made the farmers rack-renters and absolute dependants, as we see them to this day? And, was this change favourable then, to political liberty? Monastics could possess no private property, they could save no money, they could bequeath nothing. They had a life interest in their estate, and no more. They lived, received, and expended in common. Historians need not have told us, that they were easy landlords. They must have been such, unless human nature had taken a retrograde march expressly for their accommodation. And, was it not happy for the nation, that there was such a class of landlords? What a jump for joy would the farmers of England now give, if such a class were to return to-morrow, to get them out of the hands of the squandering and greedy lord and his grinding land valuer!

152. Then, look at the monastics as causing, in some of the most important of human affairs, that fixedness which is so much the friend of rectitude in morals, and which so powerfully conduces to prosperity, private and public. The Monastery was a proprietor that never died; its tenantry had to do with a deathless landlord; its lands and houses never changed owners; its tenants were liable to none of many of the uncertainties that other tenants were; its oaks had never to tremble at the axe of the squandering heir; its manors had not to dread a change of lords; its villagers had all been born and bred up under its eye and care; their character was of necessity a thing of great value, and, as such, would naturally be an object of great attention. A monastery was the centre of a circle in the country, naturally drawing to it, all that were in need of relief, advice and protection, and containing a body of men, or of women having no cares of their own, and having wisdom to the inexperienced, and wealth to relieve the distressed, was it a good thing, then, to plunder and devastate establishments: was it a reformation to squander estates thus employed, upon lay persons, who would not, who could not, and did not, do any part or particle of these benevolent acts, and acts, of public utility, which naturally arose out of the monastic institutions?

153. Lastly, let us look at the monasteries as a resource for the younger sons and daughters of the Aristocracy, and as the means of protecting the government against the injurious effects of their clamorous taunts. There cannot exist an Aristocracy, or body of Nobility, without the means, in the hands of the government, of preventing that body from falling into that contempt, which is, and always must be, inseparable from Noble-poverty. Well, some will say, why need there be any such body? That is quite another question; for we have it; and have had it for more than a thousand years; except during a very short interval, at the end of which our ancestors eagerly took it back again. I must, too, though it really has nothing to do with the question before us, repeat my opinion, many times expressed, that we should lose more than we should gain by getting rid of our Aristocracy. The basest and most corrupt government that I ever knew any thing, or heard any thing of, is the republican government of Pennsylvania, the most truly tyrannical, base and corrupt, bottom to top; from the root to the top most twig: from trunk to the extreme point of every branch. And, if then Pennsylvania, who has a name? and who will put a challenge to me to prove my words, I will, before the face of all Europe, prove them in the most complete and proper manner. I am not, therefore, for republican government and, then, it follows, that I am for an aristocracy; without such, there can be no limit to a kingly government.

154. However, this has nothing at all to do with the present (question; we have the aristocracy, and we must, by a public provision of some sort, for the younger branches of it, prevent it from falling into the degradation inseparable from poverty. This provision was, in the times of which we are speaking, made by the Monasteries, which received a great number of its monks and nuns from the families of the nobles. This rendered those odious and burdensome things, pensions and sinecures, unnecessary. It, of course, spared the taxes. It was a provision that was not degrading to the receivers; and it created no grudging and discontent amongst the people, from whom the receivers took nothing. Another great advantage arising from this mode of providing for the younger branches of the nobility was, that it secured the government, against the temptation to give offices and to lodge power in so unfit, hands. Look at our pension and sinecure list look at the history of these who have commands, and who fill offices of emolument; and you will, at once see the great benefit which must have been derived from institutions, which left the government quite free to choose commanders, ambassadors, governors and other persons, to exercise power And to be intrusted in the carrying on of the public affairs. These institutions tended, too, to check the increase of nobles; to prevent the persons connected with that order from being multiplied to the extent to which they naturally would, otherwise, be multiplied. They tended also to make the nobles not so dependant on the crown, a provision being made for their poor relations without the crown's assistance and, at the same time, they tended to make the people less dependant on the nobles than they otherwise would have been. The monasteries set the example, as masters, and landlords; an example that others were, in a great degree, compelled to follow. And thus, all ranks and degrees were benefited by these institutions which, with

malignant historians have been a subject of endless abuse, and the destruction of which they have recorded with so much delight, as being one of the brightest features in the "Reformation"!

155. Nor must we, by any means, overlook the effects of these institutions on the mere face of the country. That soul must be low and mean indeed, which is insensible to all feeling of pride in the noble edifices of its country. Love of country, that variety of feelings which, all together, constitute what we properly call patriotism, consist in part of the admiration of, and veneration for, ancient and magnificent proofs of skill and of opulence. The monastics built as well as wrote for posterity. The never dying nature of their institutions set aside, in all their undertakings, every calculation as to time and age. Whether they built or planted, they set the generous example of providing for the pleasure, the honour, the wealth and greatness of generations upon generations yet unborn. They executed every thing in the very best manner: their gardens, fish-ponds, farms in all, in the whole of their economy, they set an example tending to make the country beautiful, to make it an object of pride with the people, and to make the nation truly and permanently great. Go into any county, and survey, even at this day, the ruins of its, perhaps, twenty Abbeys and Pories; and, then, ask yourself, what have we in exchange for these? Go to the site of some once opulent Convent. Look at the cloister, now become, in the hands of a rack-renter, the receptacle for dung, fodder and faggot-wood: see the hall, where, for ages, the widow, the orphan, the aged and the stranger, found a table ready spread; see a bit of its walls now helping to make a cattle shed, the rest having been hauled away to build a work-house: recognize, in the side of a barn, a part of the once magnificent Chapel: and, if, chained to the spot by your melancholy musings, you be admonished of the approach of night by the voice of the screech-owl, issuing from those arches, which once, at the same hour, resounded with the vespers of the monk, and which have, for seven hundred years, been assailed by storms and tempests in vain; if thus admonished of the necessity of seeking food, shelter, and a bed, lift your eyes and look at the white-washed and dry rotten shell on the hill, called the "gentleman's house and, apprised of the "board-wages" and the spring guns, suddenly turn your head; jog away from the scene of devastation; with old "English Hospitality" in your mind, reach the nearest inn, and: there, in room half warmed and half-lighted, and with reception precisely proportioned to the presumed length of your purse, sit down and listen to an account of the hypocritical pretences, the base motives, the tyrannical and bloody means, under which, from which and by which, that devastation was effected, and, that hospitality banished for ever from the land.

156. We have already seen something of these pretences, motives and acts of tyranny and barbarity; we have seen that the beastly lust of the chief tyrant, was the groundwork of what is called the "Reformation"; we have seen that he could not have proceeded in his course without the concurrence of the parliament; we have seen, that, to obtain that concurrence, he held out to those who composed it a participation in the spoils of the monasteries; and, when we look at the magnitude of their possessions, when we consider the beauty and fertility of, the spots on which, they, in general, were situated, when we think of the envy which the love borne them by the people must have excited in the hearts of a great many of the noblemen and gentlemen; when we thus reflect, we are not surprised, that these were eager for a "Reformation" that, promised to transfer the envied possessions to them.

157. When men have power to commit, and are resolved to commit, acts of injustice, they are never at a loss for pretences. We shall presently see what were the pretences |under which this devastation of England was begun; but, to do the work, there requires a workman, as, to slaughter an ox, there requires a butcher. To turn the possessors of so large a part of the estates out of those estates, to destroy establishments venerated by the people from their childhood; to set all law, divine as well as human, at defiance, to violate every principle on which property rested, to rob the poor and; helpless of the means of sustenance, to deface the beauty of the country, and make it literally a heap of ruins; to do these things, there required a suitable agent; and that agent the tyrant found in **THOMAS CROMWELL**, whose first name, along with that of **CRANMER**, ought to stand for, aye accursed in the calendar. This Cromwell was the son of a blacksmith of Putney, in Surrey. He had been an underling of some sort in the family of Cardinal Wolsey and

had recommended himself to the king by his sycophancy to him, and his treachery to his old master. The king now became head of the church, and having the supremacy to exercise, had very judiciously provided himself with Cranmer, as a primate; and, to match him, he provided himself with Cromwell, who was equal to Cranmer in impiousness and baseness, rather surpassed him in dastardliness, and exceeded him decidedly in quality of ruffian. All nature could not, perhaps, have afforded another man so fit to be the **ROYAL VICE REGENT** and **VICAR-GENERAL** of the new head of the English Church.

158. Accordingly, with this character the brutal blacksmith was invested. He was to exercise all the spiritual authority belonging to the king, for the due administration of justice in all cases touching the ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and the godly reformation and redress of errors, heresies, and abuses in the said church. We shall very soon see proofs enough of the baseness of this man, for whom ruffian is too gentle a term. What chance, then, did the Monasteries stand in his hands? He was created a peer. He sat before the primate in Parliament, he sat above all the bishops in assemblies of the clergy, he took precedence of all the nobles, whether in office or out of office, and, as in character, so in place, he was second only to the chief tyrant himself.

159. In order to begin the "godly reformation"; that is to say, the work of plunder, the "Vicegerent" blacksmith set on foot a visitation of the Monasteries! Dreadful visitation! He active as he was in wickedness, could not do all the work himself. He, therefore, appointed deputies to assist in making this visitation. The kingdom was divided into districts for this purpose, and two deputies were appointed to visit each district. The object was to obtain grounds of accusation against the monks and nuns. When we consider what the object was, and what was the character of the man, to whom the work was committed, we may easily imagine what sort of men these deputies were. They were, in fact, fit to be the subalterns of such a chief. Some of the very worst men in all England; men of notoriously infamous characters; men who had been convicted of heinous crimes, some who had actually been branded; and, probably not one man who had not repeatedly deserved the halter. Think of a respectable, peaceful, harmless and pious family, broken in upon, all of a sudden, by a brace of burglars with murder written on their scowling brows, demanding an instant production of their title-deeds, money and jewels; imagine such a scene as this, and you have then some idea of the visitations of these monsters, who came with the threat of the tyrant on their lips, who menaced the victims with charges of high treason, who wrote in their reports, not what was, but what their merciless employers wanted them to write.

160. The monks and nuns, who had never dreamed of the possibility of such proceedings, who had never had an idea that **MAGNA CHARTA** and all the laws of the land could be set aside in a moment, and whose recluse and peaceful lives rendered them wholly unfit to cope with at once crafty and desperate villainy, fell before these ruffians as chickens fall before the kite. The reports, made by these villains, met with no contradiction; the accused parties had no means of making a defence; there was no court for them to appear in; they dared not, even if they had had the means, to offer a defence or make a complaint; for they had seen the horrible consequences, the burnings, the ripping up, of all those of their brethren who had ventured to whisper their dissent from any dogma or decree of the tyrant. The project was to despoil people of their property; and yet the parties from whom the property was to be taken, were to have no court, in which to plead their cause, no means of obtaining, a hearing, could make even no complaint but at the peril of their lives. They and these who depended on them were to be, at once, stripped of this great mass of property, without any other ground than that of reports, made by men, sent, as the malignant **HUME** himself confesses, for the express purpose of finding a pretence for the dissolution of the Monasteries and for the King's taking to himself prerogatives that had never belonged to him or his predecessors.

161. **HUME** dares not, in the face of such a multitude of facts that are upon record to the contrary, pretend that these reports were true; but, he does his best to put a gloss upon them, as we have seen in paragraph 129. He says, in order to effect by insinuation that which he does not venture to assert, that it is, indeed, probable, that the blind submission of the people, during those ages,

rendered the friars and nuns more unguarded and more dissolute than they are in any Roman Catholic country at present. Oh! say you so? And why more blind than now? It is just the same religion, there are the same rules, the people, if blind then, are blind now; and, it would be singular indeed, that, when dissoluteness is become more common in the world, the friars and nuns should have become, more guarded! However, we have here his acquittal of the Monasteries of the present day, and that is no small matter. It will be difficult, I believe, to make it appear probable that they were more unguarded, or more dissolute, in the 16th century; unless we believe, that the profound piety (which Hume calls superstition) of the people was not partaken of by the inhabitants of convents. Before we can listen to life insinuations in favour of these reports, we must believe, that the persons belonging to the religious communities were a body of cunning creatures, believing in no part of that religion which they professed, and we must extend this our belief even to those numerous communities of women, who devoted their whole lives to the nursing of the sick poor!

162. However, upon reports, thus obtained, an Act of Parliament was passed, in March, 1536, the same year that saw the end of Anne Boylen, for the suppression, that is to say, confiscation, of three hundred and seventy-six Monasteries, and for granting their estates, real and personal, to the King and his heirs! He took plate, jewels, gold and silver images and ornaments. This act of monstrous tyranny was, however, base as the Parliament was, and full as it was of greedy plunderers, not passed without some opposition. **HUME** says, that it does not appear that any opposition was made to this important law. He frequently quotes **SPELMAN** as an historical authority; but, it did not suit him to quote Spelman's "*History of Sacrilege*," in which this Protestant Historian says, that the bill stuck long, in the Lower House, and could get no passage, when the King commanded the Commons to attend him in the forenoon in his gallery, where he let them wait till late in the afternoon, and then, coming out of his chamber, walking a turn or two amongst them and looking angrily on them, first on one side, and then on the other, at last, I hear (saith he) that my bill will not, pass; but I will have it pass, or I will have some of your heads; and, without other rhetoric, returned to his chamber. Enough was said; the bill passed, and all was given him as he "desired."

163. Thus, then, it was an act of sheer tyranny; it was a pure Algerine proceeding at last. The pretences availed nothing: the reports of Cromwell's myrmidons were not credited; every artifice had failed; resort was had to the halter and the axe to accomplish that "Reformation" of which the Scotch historian, **BURNET**, has called this monster the first-born son! Some such man, he says, was necessary, to bring about this great and glorious event. What! was ever good yet produced by wickedness so atrocious? Did any man but this **BURNET** and his countryman **HUME**, ever affect to believe, that such barefaced injustice and tyranny were justified on the ground of their tending to good consequences?

164. In the next Number, when I shall have given an account of the whole of that devastation and sacking, of which we have, as yet, only seen a mere beginning, I shall come to the consequences, not only to the monks and nuns, but to the people at large; and shall show how a foundation was, in this very Act of Parliament, laid for that pauperism, misery, degradation and crime, which are now proposed to be checked by laws to render the women barren, or to export the people to foreign lands.

The End Letter 5



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Word of the Lord from Jerusalem"
(Isaiah 2:3)."**

