

THE SUSTAINMENT OF PROTESTANTISM.

This righteous rule is simply set aside in the treatment of Catholics and their religion. Instead of the *onus probandi*, as it is called, the burden of proof, lying with the accuser, it is simply thrown upon the accused. Any one may get up of a sudden, and may say what he will to our prejudice, without producing any warrant at all for the truth of his charge. He is not called upon to establish his respectability, or to state his opportunities or methods of knowing; he need not give presumptive proof of his allegation; he need not give his authorities; he need only accuse; and upon this the Protestant public turns round to the poor Catholic, and asks what he has to say in his defence, as if he had anything to defend. There is a saying that "a fool can ask more questions than a hundred wise men can answer," and a bigot or a fanatic may be quite as successful. If a man presented himself this moment and said to me, "You robbed a person in the street of his pocket-book some ten years ago," what could I possibly say, except simply, "I did not"? How could I prove it was false, even if I took on myself to do so, till I was informed of the town, or the year, or the occasion, or the person on whom the pretended offence was committed? Well, supposing my accusers went on to particulars, and said that I committed the crime in Birmingham, in the month of June, in the year 1840, and in the instance of a person of the name of Smith. This, of course, would be something, but no one would say, even then, that it was enough, that is, supposing I had to reply to him on the spot. At the very moment I might not be able to say where I was on the specified day, and so I could only repeat, as emphatically as I was able, that the charge was utterly untrue.

Next, supposing me to ask his reasons for advancing it;—How he knew it was I? did he see me? or was he told by an eye-witness? and suppose he were to decline to give me any information whatever, but contented himself with saying "that I was shuffling and evasive, for the thing was quite notorious." And next, supposing that I suddenly recollected that, up to the year 1845, I had never once seen Birmingham in the course of my life; yet on my stating this, the accuser were to cry out that I should not escape, in spite of my attempt to throw dust in his eyes; for he had a score of witnesses to prove the fact, and that, as to the exact year, it was a mere point of detail, on which any one might be mistaken. And supposing, on this un-supposed allegation, a magistrate, without witness brought, or oath administered, or plausibility in the narrative, in spite of the accuser's character, which was none of the best, in spite of the vagueness of his testimony, were to send me to prison—I conceive public opinion would say I was shamefully treated.

But further, supposing when I was safely lodged in prison, some anonymous writer, in some third-rate newspaper, were boldly to assert that all priests were in the practise of stealing pocket-books from passengers in the streets; and in the proof thereof were to appeal, first to the notorious case of a priest in Birmingham who had been convicted of the offence, and then to the case of a second priest which was given in detail in some manuscript or other in the royal library of Munich, and occurring some time or other between the seventh and seventeenth centuries; and suppose upon this anonymous article or letter, petitions were got up and signed numerously, and dispatched to the Imperial Parliament, with the object of sending all priests to the treadmill for a period not exceeding six months, as reputed thieves, whenever they were found walking in the public thoroughfares;—would this answer an Englishman's idea of fairness and humanity?

Now I put it to the experience,—I put it to the conscience of the Protestant world,—whether such is not the justice which it deals out to Catholics as a matter of course. No evidence against us is too little; no infliction too great. Statement without proof, though inadmissible in every other case, is all fair when we are concerned. A Protestant is at liberty to bring a charge against us, and challenge us to refute, not any proof he brings, for he brings none, but his simple assumption or assertion. And perhaps we accept his challenge, and then we find we have to deal with matters so vague or so minute, so general or so particular, that we are at our wits' end to know how to grapple with them. For instance, "Every twentieth man you meet is a Jesuit in disguise;" or, "Nunneries are, for the most part, prisons." How is it possible to meet such

sweeping charges? The utmost we can do, in the nature of things, is to show that this particular man, or that, is not a Jesuit; or that this or that particular nunnery is not a prison; but who said he was? who said it was? What our Protestant accuser asserted was, that every twentieth man was a Jesuit, and most nunneries were prisons. How is this refuted by clearing this or that person or nunnery of the charge? Thus, if the accuser is not to be called on to give proofs of what he says, we are simply helpless, and must sit down meekly under the imputation.

At another time, however, a definite fact is stated, and we are referred to the authority on which it is put forward. What is the authority? Albertus Magnus, perhaps, or Gerson, or Baronius, with a silence about volume and page; their works consist of five, ten, fifteen, twenty or thirty folios, printed in double columns. How are we possibly to find the needle in this stack of hay? Or, by a refinement of unfairness, perhaps a wrong volume or page is carelessly given; and when we cannot find there the statement which our opponent has made, we are left in an unpleasant doubt whether our ill success is to be ascribed to our eyes or to his pen.

Sometimes, again, the crime charged on us is brought out with such startling vividness and circumstantial finish as to seem to carry its own evidence with it, and to dispense, in the eyes of the public, with the references which in fairness should attend it. The scene is laid in some fortress of the savage Apennine, or in secluded Languedoc, or in remote Poland, or the high table-land of Mexico; or it is a legend about a priest of a small village in Calabria, called Buonavalle, in the fourteenth century; or about a monk of the monastery of St. Spirito, in S. Filippo d'Argiro, in the time of Charlemagne. Or the story runs, that Don Felix Malatesta de Guadalupe, a Benedictine monk of Andalusia, and father confessor to the Prince of the Asturias, who died in 1821, left behind him his confessions in manuscript, which were carried off by the French with other valuable documents, from his convent, which they pillaged in their retreat from the field of Salamanca; and that in these confessions he frankly avows that he had killed three of his monastic brothers of whom he was jealous, had poisoned half-a-dozen women, and sent off in boxes and hampers to Cadiz and Barcelona thirty-five infants; moreover, that he felt no misgivings about these abominable deeds, because, he observes with great naiveté, he had every day, for many years, burnt a candle to the Blessed Virgin; had cursed periodically all heretics, especially the royal family of England; had burnt a student of Corinna for asserting the earth went around the sun, had worn about him, day and night, a relic of St. Diego; and had provided that five hundred masses should be said for the repose of his soul within eighty days after his decease.

Tales such as this, the like of which it is very easy to point out in print, are suitably contrived to answer the purpose which brings them into being. A Catholic who, in default of testimony offered in their behalf, volunteers to refute them on their internal evidence, and sets about (so to say) cross-examining them, finds himself at once in an untold labyrinth of embarrassment. First he enquires is there a convent of St. Spirito in the Sicilian town specified? did it exist in the time of Charlemagne? who were the successive confessors of the Prince of the Asturias during the first twenty years of this century? what has Andalusia to do with Salamanca? when was the last *auto da fe* in Spain? did the French pillage any convent whatever in the neighbourhood of Salamanca about the year 1812?—questions sufficient for a school examination. He goes to his maps, gazeteers, guide-books, travels, histories,—soon a perplexity arises about the dates, are his editions recent enough for his purpose? do their historical notices go far enough back? Well, after a good deal of trouble, after writing about to friends, consulting libraries, and comparing statements, let us suppose him to prove most conclusively the utter absurdity of the slanderous story, and to bring out a lucid, powerful, and unanswerable reply; who cares for it by that time? who cares for the story itself? it has done its work, time stops for no man, it has created or deepened the impression in the minds of its hearers that a monk commits murder or adultery as readily as he eats his dinner. Men forget the process by which they receive it, but there it is, clear and indelible. Or supposing they recollect the particular slander ever so well, still they have no taste or stomach for entering into a long controversy about it, their mind is already made