

The True Witness

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MONTREAL, FRIDAY, DEC. 12, 1862.

NEWS OF THE WEEK.

THE affairs of Greece and the question of who shall succeed to its vacant throne may yet give rise to serious complications. Prince Alfred seems to be the choice of the people; but Russia has, it is said, interposed, and has intimated to Great Britain and France, that she will not recognise him as King of Greece. Affairs in Italy remain unchanged. Brigandage, however, as it is called, is as rife as ever in the Kingdom of Naples, and great as is the military power of Sardinia, it has as yet proved inadequate to the task of subjugating the Neapolitans. Garibaldi's health is reported as improving, the bullet having been extracted from his leg.

Skirmishes, but no decisive battles have occurred between the Federals and the Confederates since our last. The severity of the weather may probably account, in part, for the inaction of General Burnside, but it is pretended that his Government has but very poorly provided him with the material necessary for an offensive movement. As a sign of the spirit by which the party now in power is actuated, and of its aptitude for slavery, it may be noted that the House of Representatives has, by a majority of 90 to 45 passed a Bill exonerating all persons, from the President downwards, from the consequences of their illegal acts, and arbitrary imprisonment of innocent persons.

THE MONTREAL "WITNESS" ON MIRACLES.—Our contemporary of the 3rd instant tells us, "that many thoughtful people are still at a loss to know what to think of" several rapid and extraordinary cures which have lately taken place at the *Hotel Dieu* Hospital of Montreal; and which cures were preceded by a *Novena*, and recommendation to the prayers of St. Michel Des Saints, of whom some relics were lately brought from Rome to Montreal by the Bishop of the last named City. The *Witness* does not deny the facts; but he endeavors in his issue above cited, so to account for those facts, as not to be obliged to admit supernatural interference, on the one hand, or to assert fraud upon the part of the Bishop and Sisters of the *Hotel Dieu*, upon the other. The hypothesis started by our contemporary is simply this: That the cures are to be attributed to the "imagination of the patients," in which there is, "when combined with a firm will and an enthusiastic confidence in some new process of cure, a healing power which sometimes produces the most astounding and sudden results." Whether this be, or be not, a satisfactory explanation of the phenomena alluded to, it is not our present object to enquire; our business is rather to examine and criticise the arguments by which our contemporary attempts to support his hypothesis.

He argues that although "the perfect honesty of the nuns and their clergy" is not questioned, the hypothesis of any miraculous or supernatural factor in the process of cure of the several patients must be rejected; and this chiefly because it is absurd to suppose that, "the apostolic era of miracles is to be re-enacted here in Montreal through the instrumentality of the doubtful bones of a Spaniard hitherto unknown to the world, who has been created a saint only a few months since, through a canonising power which rests entirely now upon twenty thousand French bayonets."

In the above there are almost as many false statements as there are lines; and in so far as it is an argument against modern Popish miracles and the virtue of the relics of saints, it is an argument against the veracity of Jesus Christ, and the credibility of the Old Testament. Our readers may however expect from us a reply thereto.

We say then, that in the first place, and with regard to its statements, the *Witness* is in error in asserting that St. Michel Des Saints "has been created a saint only a few months since;" for an act of canonisation is simply an act declaratory, and cannot in any sense affect the status in the other world of him to whom it refers. Protestants for the most part are, as we are by experience well aware, grossly, ludicrously, ignorant of the meaning of the rites, ceremonies and discip-

line of the Catholic Church which they criticise; but charity bids us hope that amongst the most ignorant of our separated brethren, there is not one so stupid as to believe that Catholics attribute to the Pope the power of "making" Saints; or of doing more than simply declaring, after a careful and most rigid scrutiny of all the circumstances connected with the life and death of one eminent for piety and holiness of living, and of the marvels by which God has been pleased to attest His pleasure with His faithful servant,—that he or she is indeed reigning with Christ, and is entitled to be venerated accordingly by the faithful upon earth.

In the second place, it is equally false to pretend that this declaratory power is in any manner connected with the support given to the Pope, as a temporal sovereign, by the French army of occupation at Rome. The temporalities of the Pope are at the present moment it is true, supported by French bayonets against the hostile designs of the King of Sardinia, who desires to make himself master of Rome; but the spiritual authority of the Sovereign Pontiff, on which alone his "canonising power" depends, would be the same if he were in exile, or like his predecessors in the Chair of Peter were driven to seek shelter from the fury of the persecutors in the bowels of the earth. To no earthly power is the Pope indebted for his authority in spirituals; and by no power on earth or in hell can that authority be in any manner impaired. These things we would beg of the *Witness* to bear in mind; and we would respectfully exhort him to distinguish between the temporal accidents of the Papacy, and that which is inherent, and essential to it.

Why it should be "absurd" to believe that miracles, or supernatural cures of the sick, should be wrought in Canada, and in the nineteenth century, as well as in Palestine and in the first century of our era—we cannot understand; unless it be absurd to believe that the person known in history as Jesus Christ was really invested with supernatural power Himself, was capable of imparting a similar power to others, and was also one whose word and most solemn promises might be relied upon. If Christ was an impostor, it is we admit, "absurd" to believe that miracles ever were, or can now be, worked in His name, and by the prayers of His servants. But if He was not an impostor, and a wilful deceiver, then is there nothing "absurd" in such a belief in any place, or in any era; for the promises of Christ to them that believed, were not limited to any particular century or to any particular country, but were general as to both time and place.—There is therefore no greater antecedent improbability in the account of a nineteenth century, than in that of a first century, miracle. If honest and naturally intelligent witnesses to the facts to which they deposed were competent to establish a miraculous interference with regard to what are vaguely called the "laws of nature," eighteen hundred years ago—witnesses equally endowed with honesty and natural intelligence are competent to establish the fact of a similar interference at the present day.

That miracles should occur "privately in the hospitals of the nuns," rather than in a public place, cannot seem "absurd" to those who remember that Our Lord Himself refused to gratify the curiosity of the incredulous—and that it is recorded of Him, that "he did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief."

Nor does it seem more "absurd" to believe that restoration to health may be effected by the "instrumentality of the bones" of one who in his lifetime had been a zealous servant of Christ, than it is to believe that—(we quote from the Protestant version of the Bible)—when in haste a dead man was cast into the sepulchre of Elisha and touched the bones of that prophet, "he revived and stood up on his feet" II. Kings 13—21. Apply the test given by the *Montreal Witness*—and Dr. Colenso does apply it—and much of the Old and New Testament must be rejected as "carrying about itself such a stamp of absurdity as to find, we should think, but little credence amongst the intelligent and educated."—*Witness 3rd instant.*

It is also urged by the *Witness* that the hypothesis of a supernatural factor in the cures which have lately taken place at the *Hotel Dieu* must be rejected, as these cures differ "from those of the Gospel in an important particular:—"

"For, while the latter followed instantaneously the application of the miraculous power, those of the *Hotel Dieu* have required eleven and a half hours to three days, thus affording time to the healing process."—*Witness 3rd instant.*

This argument is inconclusive, because based upon a false assumption of facts. It is not true that all the miraculous cures effected by Our Lord Himself were instantaneous, or followed immediately upon the application of the miraculous power. The miracle recorded by St. Mark viii. 22, 23, 24, 25, is a case in point: for it is evident that the restoration of sight to the blind man at Bethsaida was a gradual process—the first application of the miraculous power having effected only a partial cure. Again in the Old Testament we read how King Hezekiah was "sick unto death;" and that sent by the Lord, the prophet Isaiah warned the king "thou shalt die, and not live." At the earnest entreaty of Hezekiah, the

Lord promised to heal him: yet was not this cure effected immediately, or simultaneously with the application of the figs which the prophet enjoined. It took three days to effect the perfect cure of Hezekiah; yet in his case the interference of a supernatural agent is expressly asserted by a book which the *Witness* calls inspired, and the Word of God—2 Kings xx. Our contemporary therefore should be cautious how from his premises given above he concludes against the presence of a supernatural factor in the production of the phenomena at the *Hotel Dieu*.

It will be seen that we express no opinion of our own upon the subject; and that—while we contend that the reasons assigned by the *Witness* for discarding the "miracle," or supernatural interference, hypothesis is "absurd," are insufficient—we do not presume to assert the truth of that hypothesis. We can only state facts: we can say and from personal knowledge of the fact—that whereas certain patients were a few days ago seriously ill, they are to-day, and after certain prayers, in the enjoyment of all the outward and visible signs of robust health. As the blind man to whom Our Lord restored sight would only reply to the questions of the incredulous Pharisees—"one thing I know that, whereas I was blind now I see"—St. John ix. 25—so all that we can presume to say of the lately cured at the *Hotel Dieu* is this—"one thing only we know that, whereas, they were sick, now they are well." From these facts every one is at liberty to form his own conclusions.

Before concluding we must however notice two other assertions of the *Witness*: one with reference to La Salette: the other, to the well known miracle of St. Januarius at Naples. With reference to the first he says:—

"The remembrance of the celebrated miracles of La Salette in France is quite fresh, and although Bishops endorsed them with all their pastoral authority, and the Pope sanctioned them, yet, after two years of successful imposition, the lady who personified the Virgin Mary, in the original miraculous apparition, was traced, arrested, tried before a French court—and sentenced to the penitentiary."—*Witness 3rd instant.*

We take the liberty of asking our contemporary to produce his authority, and evidence for the truth of the above story, which we trust his well known regard for evangelical truth will induce him not to withhold. With reference to the miracle of St. Januarius he says:—

"The annual miracle of the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius in Naples has acquired a world-wide notoriety. The miracle which for ages has been managed by the highest priests of Naples, under the control of the hierarchy, with the sanction of the Pope and the approbation of the whole Catholic clergy has been unmasked, its secret is known, and it can be performed by any chemist here; the blood coloured coagulated composition melting in a few minutes by the sole contact of the hand with the bottle which holds it."—*Id.*

There is but one objection to be raised against this explanation of the asserted miracle, and it is this. That, as the bottle, said to contain the blood of St. Januarius, is not held in any body's hand when the phenomenon of ebullition is elicited, that phenomenon cannot be owing to the "sole contact of the hand with the bottle." This argument is somewhat the same in principle as that of the father in the *Critic* who tells his distracted daughter:—

"... The Spanish fleet thou canst not see
"Cause 'tis not yet in sight,"

and we claim therefore no credit for originality in urging it; yet to most minds it will appear conclusive—for even an "intelligent Protestant" can hardly fail to perceive that, if the bottle is not held, or touched even, when the phenomenon of liquefaction displays itself—it cannot be any additional heat given out by the hand grasping it—which causes the liquefaction of the bottle's contents. Now the bottle or phial containing the blood is so arranged that it is impossible that it should ever come in contact with the hand, or any part of the body, of those who display it. It is enclosed betwixt two plates of crystal, somewhat in the manner that, at the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, the latter is enclosed in the Remonstrance. To this is attached a base, or handle by means of which it can be elevated, and its contents exhibited to the public; and the phenomenon of the liquefaction and ebullition of the blood is elicited, not when it is held or exposed,—but only when the case containing the head of the Saint is brought into proximity with it. Again we do not presume to explain the phenomenon; but the explanation proffered by the *Witness*, is one which, though it has been often put forward by half-educated persons, and by persons unacquainted with the particulars of the ceremony known as the "miracle" of St. Januarius, is now abandoned altogether, as too ludicrous, too puerile to stand in need of serious refutation. It supposes or assumes that which in fact is notoriously false—that the phial is held in the hand when the mysterious liquefaction of its contents occurs; and thence it concludes that it is the heat communicated through the glass, from the hand, to the contents, which causes the liquefaction of the latter. The simple fact however, that, when the latter phenomenon manifests itself, the phial is neither held in the hand, nor in communication with any heat giving surface, satisfactorily disposes of this time honored solution, which intelligent Great Britons have been in the habit of putting forward for the last hundred years or more, and which therefore as an old friend the *Witness* finds it difficult to abandon.

* Of the case of Mary Connolly, we know nothing personally.

IS PROTESTANTISM A RELIGIOUS SYSTEM ADAPTED TO THE WANTS OF THE PEOPLE OF ENGLAND?—Abandoning the historical line of defence of Christianity, as untenable, it is the fashion of many Protestant writers to appeal to the subjective evidence of its truth, and to cite its marvellous and universal adaptation to the wants, and to the capacities of men. Such a religion, it is argued, and well argued, must be from Him Who made man, and Who alone knows all his wants.

Let us apply this argument to Protestantism, considered as a religious system, or as a phase of Christianity; and as a test of its origin, divine or diabolic—let us consider whether it is really adapted to the wants and capacities of man as he is. If it is not, if it is evidently useless as a religion to a large mass of the people, it evidently cannot be from God, and must therefore claim 'the other party' as its spiritual father.

Protestantism asserts, if it asserts anything, that the book called the Bible is the sole rule of faith, or authority in the religious order, that God has vouchsafed to man; and that as there are no divinely appointed interpreters of that book, none who, speaking in the name of God, have any authority to declare its meaning—every man must, and is bound, thence to deduce for himself his own religion, to the best of his abilities. The Bible, and the Bible alone, as interpreted by the individual for himself, is, according to Protestantism, the only chart given by God to guide the tempest-tossed soul safely across the great ocean of life, to the haven of eternal rest. The question therefore arises—is this chart adequate for that purpose?—is it such a guide as the great mass of the people do, or even can, avail themselves of?—is it universally adapted to their wants, and their actual condition at the present day?

As a reply to this question, we will cite the *London Times* of the 15th October on the actual intellectual condition of the great mass of the laboring population of England, both in town and in country; and we will leave it to the unprejudiced reader to determine how far a religious system, which imperatively requires of all its votaries the intelligent perusal of the Bible as the sole exponent of God's will, and dealings with man—is suited to the actual intellectual capacities of such a population:—

"Our agricultural population are still very helpless and thrifless, still unable to extricate themselves from a passing difficulty, and to get a living if turned off by an employer or out of a cottage. They are still often disqualified for employment they would otherwise deserve, by not being able to write, or even to read. They are still generally so ignorant that no reasonable being, for pity's sake, would ask them a question of history or geography out of their own village, or more than fifty years back. They are still a prey to the first fanatic or impostor that chooses to work upon them. They are still so incapable of distinguishing between truth and error that, were they once deprived of the guidance of the gentry and the clergy, they would be positively dangerous to order by their mere simplicity and credulity. This is the case of our now educated peasantry. When we turn to the artisan the case is certainly worse."—*London Times.*

To such a people, it is, we think, evident that the Bible, and the Bible alone, as the sole rule of faith, or guide and teacher in the supernatural order, must be utterly useless, or worse than useless; and therefore, unless God has by His eternal decrees excluded them from the blessings of Redemption; if the religion revealed by Christ be not purposely hidden from their eyes, it is equally evident that He must have made some other provision for their salvation; and have furnished them with some other means for acquiring a knowledge of all the essential truths of Christianity, than that with which Protestantism can alone supply them. Protestantism, whatever it may be for the intelligent, the studious, and the learned, is not—in so far as it necessarily presupposes an obligation incumbent upon every man to interpret the Bible for himself—a system adapted to the wants and intellectual capacity even of England's "educated peasantry;" it cannot therefore have for its author a Being who desires, and has made ample provision for the salvation of all His creatures.

Indeed the *Times*, unconsciously perhaps, but most fully pronounces the condemnation of the fundamental principle of Protestantism, when it tells us that, the great mass of the people of England, of Protestant Bible-distributing England, "are still so incapable of distinguishing between truth and error," that they would be positively dangerous to order "were they once deprived of the guidance of the gentry and clergy." The Bible then, the Bible alone, is not sufficient even for the preservation of the natural order, and of the peace of society, unless its teachings be supplemented by "the guidance of the gentry and clergy;" much more then must the Bible alone, be insufficient in the supernatural order, and incompetent to teach the "educated peasantry" of England the way of eternal life.

And if the Bible, and an abundance of Bible, has, as is admitted by the *Times*, proved itself inadequate to prevent the great mass of the working classes of England from falling into the deplorable condition of moral and mental darkness it is described, so that they are a "prey to the first fanatic or impostor that chooses to work upon them"—how can it be expected that the circulation of the Bible amongst the benighted heathen, amongst the Kaffirs, and the Hottentots

—the black men of New Holland, and the degraded races of China—shall have the effect of raising and improving their moral and intellectual condition? It is not too much to say that the "Bible alone" has proved an arrant failure; since there where the experiment has been the most fully and fairly tried, there the people, even the "educated peasantry," are in such a condition that they would be "positively dangerous to order," if they were "once deprived of the guidance of the gentry and clergy." Is not this tantamount to the confession that Protestant England is indebted for what of "order," for what of social security against revolution and anarchy it still enjoys—not to an "open Bible;" but to the influence of the lauded aristocracy, and of a body of spiritual teachers of whom some derive their authority from the State, and the remainder from sources equally apostolic?

The mere existence of such a body amongst Protestants, is in itself the complete refutation of Protestantism, in so far as the latter is based upon the all sufficiency of the Bible as the rule of faith, or as of itself able to make men wise unto salvation. If it is, the people have no need of any other guidance; if God has Himself appointed, or commissioned no body of teachers as expounders of His written Word, no man, no body of men, has, or can have the shadow of a right to arrogate to themselves the functions of religious guides and teachers. With an open Bible, and the Bible alone, in his hands, every man is, if Protestantism be not a lie, fully competent to do all his own religious thinking, and to be his own religious guide, pastor and minister. The consistent Protestant stands in no need of it, and should spurn with contempt, the impertinently proffered suggestions, interpretations of or comments upon, the sacred text, which a Protestant "clergy" obtrude upon him. Who gave you authority to preach to me, or to lecture me upon my religious belief, or my duties towards God?—should be his indignant protest against the first manifestation of an intent to infringe upon his sacred and heaven-derived right of "private judgment," and the fundamental principle of Protestantism: "Have I not the Bible also? am I not fully as able to rightly interpret its meaning, and to appropriate its contents as you are? and am I not bound by our common Protestant Faith to interpret that book for myself, and to abide the issue?" There are the questions which must come to the lips of every intelligent and consistent Protestant, at the aspect of such a ludicrous anomaly as an interpreter of a book which is of itself all-sufficient, and which God Himself has given to man as his sole rule of faith and spiritual instructor.

And if the Protestant would not be justified in holding such language, would not be justified in rejecting with disdain all attempts made by others to bias his mind in favor of one interpretation, rather than of another, of the sacred text, it can only be because the Bible alone, and as interpreted by "private judgment" is not the divine scheme for man's redemption: because the Bible is not all-sufficient to make men wise unto salvation; and because, as the *Times* admits, and as all experience testifies, without some other guidance than that which the "Bible alone" affords, these would be no security for order, no protection to society against the passions of the great mass of the population, who in spite of an "open Bible" are "still incapable of distinguishing between truth and error."—*London Times.*

And in conclusion we would ask of the Missionaries to French Canadian Papists, who are endeavoring to reclaim us from the errors of our ways, and to overthrow the influence of the Romish priesthood—what guarantee they can offer—what assurance they can give, that—when they shall have fully succeeded—the then Protestant people of Canada shall be in a better moral and intellectual plight, than are the Protestant people of England? If the latter, after three centuries of an "open Bible" and of deliverance from the soul destroying, and intelligence-crushing errors of Popery, are "still incapable of distinguishing between truth and error," is it to be expected that the poor French Canadians shall leap at once from thick darkness into the full glare of light? If three hundred years of "open Bible" have left the Protestant masses of England "a prey to the first fanatic or impostor that chooses to work upon them," are we to believe that, naturally, the French Canadians are so vastly superior even to the "educated peasantry" of Great Britain, that there is no danger of similar results with an "open Bible" in Canada? And if, with the blessings of the Protestant Faith, and a Protestant civilisation, the masses, the laboring classes of Protestant England would be "positively dangerous to order" were they once deprived of the guidance of the gentry—how can we flatter ourselves that, in Canada, where with one or two exceptions there are no "gentry" properly so called, social order shall be maintained, when the mass of the people shall have been taught to despise and to reject the influence of their "clergy?"

Mr. Francis O'Neill has kindly consented to act as agent for the *True Witness* for Pakenham and surrounding neighborhood.