

ON THE EXTENT TO WHICH RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IS ENJOYED BY PROTESTANTS OR DENIED TO THEM IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES.

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I begin, with the condition of British Protestants in foreign countries, which will open the way, by a natural process, to the wider subject of Protestant restriction in those countries, in which Popery is the ascendant, and Governments regulate their policy according to the dictates of Rome. A variety of questions at once suggest themselves to an intelligent mind, the moment that such a subject as this is mooted. What has been the line of policy usually adopted by our Government on the subject of religious liberty abroad? Especially, has it manifestly and vigorously sought to secure a national progress, to the wider health, or commercial enterprise or scientific pursuit, or even civility, had drawn for a time into Papal countries,—unrestrained and open liberty of worship? What is the actual state of things in some of those countries in which British subjects most abound, and in which British influence can be brought the most directly and effectively to bear? And what are the demands that ought to be made, and the practical measures that ought to be adopted, in order to bring matters right wherever they are wrong; to secure a complete and destructive of religious liberty, even that the British Protestant, wherever he is to be found, shall enjoy the same amount of toleration as the Spanish or Italian Papist has cheerfully yielded to him in Portugal? I shall endeavour to give a brief reply to these queries.

In regard to the policy of our Government on the subject of religious liberty abroad, and especially for the protection of its own subjects in the rights of worship, it is a subject upon which we have lately been of a most unworthy description. There have been an indifference, and an inaction on this great matter, which foreign Governments have not been slow to interpret according to their own wishes, and which, again and again, have had all the practically disastrous effects of the most active hostility. Again and again, our successive statesmen have themselves boasted, they have had the "creating" of constitutions and the dictating of treaties, and they have let slip the golden opportunity of insuring laws for the protection of religious liberty.

In the treaty which was formed some years since, at the conclusion of our war with China, when the Emperor was ready to consent to almost any conditions that would end our warships from his rivers, no conditions were ever named by those who acted for our Government at that important crisis; and we stand only owe it to the intercession of the King of the French for liberty of worship to the French Roman Catholic in China, that British Protestants were engaged to be protected, the Emperor having in his solemn and determined to concede no worship to those Christians, who, as he expressed it, "did not worship gods," as well as those who did. The same ill-judged partiality was shown in re-modelling the constitution of Sicily, so lately as the year 1845. That revision and reconstruction took place under the eye of our Government, and they had for their guidance the old constitution of 1812, which was also framed under a British sanction and influence, and contained an article expressly in favour of liberty of worship. Such an article, therefore, had not the first time to be introduced, it had merely to be retained; and its retention would have been of incalculable moment, not only for the cause of religious freedom, and, through this, of religion in Sicily itself, but Austria and Italy, and other countries open to Sicilian influence. But before the eyes of British statesmen, and if not with their active concurrence, at least without their remonstrance, this precious provision was allowed to drop, and conscience left unprotected by the constitution or by the law.

The manner in which our Governments have acted, when British subjects in Papal countries have, by their zeal and success, availed the jealousy and interference of the ecclesiastical and civil authorities, has been equally unworthy of a great country, which boasts itself as standing in the vanguard of liberty, and which owes nearly all its greatness to its Protestantism. I can only refer, in this rapid survey, to two cases which painfully but truly illustrate the spirit in which our Government has viewed foreign dissidence. In 1829, when the late Mr. Graydon, secretary of the British and Foreign Bible Society, was endeavouring to circulate copies of the Word of God in Spain, he was arrested, brought to trial, and judgment passed against him. It is but justice to add, that the judge and jury became so ashamed of the decision, that they obtained a new trial, and Mr. Graydon was acquitted. But, meanwhile, correspondence was busy between the two Governments. The Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs wrote to our Minister, complaining of Mr. Graydon's intolerable conduct in circulating the Bible, and insisting that he should be warned, in common with all other British subjects, to abstain from such conduct in future, and from in any way disturbing or "intermeddling with" the religion of Spain. And how did our British Minister receive this communication? Was it by refusing to comply with a demand to preposterous as to prevent a British subject from circulating the Word of God? Was it by reminding Count Orliz and his fellow-ministers of the full liberty which Spanish Catholics and all others enjoyed in Britain? Was it by reminding him how contrary all restraints upon liberty of conscience were to justice, to reason, to religion itself, and the spirit of the age; and that the sooner such laws were repealed or allowed to fall into desuetude the better? No. This was, indeed, the tone that would have been seemed a British Minister. But not one word of defence was uttered in

behalf of the offending Mr. Graydon. All similar efforts were for the future introduced by a letter to our ambassador at the Spanish court, in which he was instructed to prohibit all British subjects from interfering with the religion of Spain, and to assure them, that if they did so, all British protection would be withheld from them, and they would be left to the tender mercies of Spanish tribunals and inquisitions. In addition to the "Letter to Lord Palmerston" of my friend, Dr. James Thompson, I know of no production that gives a truer and yet humbler a view of the complexion and character of British policy, in reference to religious liberty abroad, as the well-written work of the Rev. W. H. Hale, entitled, "Memoir of a Mission to Gibraltar and Spain." The author speaks "what he knows, and testifies what he has seen."

The case of Dr. Kalley, in Madeira, is both more recent and better known. The proceedings were in harmony with the law of Portugal; for instructions were given without his own hired name, to "Sinal, But every one knows how the approaches to his house were watched almost day and night, by bands of police, to prevent his intercourse with inquirers—how, when success crowned his efforts in hundreds of converts, his life was thus threatened, and he only escaped a violent death by fleeing from Madeira in the cause of a peasant—how immorally to the Government, and especially to the Foreign Minister, beseeching him to interfere by correspondence with the Government of Portugal, and protect a British subject from wrong, and even from probable murder. He was treated with cold indifference, though the lifting of a little finger would have been enough to make Portugal at least respect its own laws—and how Dr. Kalley remains, up to this moment, uncompensated for the loss of property he sustained, through the violence of mobs and otherwise, in Madeira. Writing from Lebanon, in the spring of the present year, Dr. Kalley adverts to this fact, and mentions that "he has found perfect protection at least under the law, but not in fact."

The effect of this long-continued and most unworthy policy, on the part of successive British Governments, has been most disastrous to the cause of religious liberty. When Papal Governments saw that our Government treated the right of worship for its people in foreign countries with such utter indifference, and that up to a certain point at least they might restrain and persecute with impunity, it was not likely that they would greatly beset themselves to relax the rigour and intolerance of their laws, and that they would deny the right of conscience to those who ourselves should neither anxiety nor extortions. Indeed, the impression is very extensively circulated in continental countries,—and it must be acknowledged that in the circumstances it is by no means an unnatural one,—that since we are so very indifferent about the right of religious worship to our people in foreign countries, we must surely be indifferent about religion itself. The consequence is, that in more than one of those countries, where our Government and our countrymen are few, and our people very few, Protestantism is branded with ignominy, and compelled to skulk in secret, and little more than the last remnant of religious freedom remains.—*Edm. Christ.*

ITALY.

Piedmont appears to be the only territory in which religious liberty has derived advantage from the recent revolution. When the dawn of freedom was sent forth from the ark, after the billows had begun to subside, this was the only spot on which she could find a place for the sole of her foot. In all the other States there has been reaction and restriction, rather than extended privilege. And the conclusion seems unavoidable, from all that is now going on in Italy, that the Pope and the various powers that divide among themselves the sovereignty of Italy, are banded together to stifle and deprecate every tendency against the bible and the rights of conscience. In Geneva, within the last few years, we have seen a little place of worship for foreign protestants watched by police, in order to prevent the entrance of a single Italian; and the place on the point of being tased to the ground, on the false report that some Italians had been present at the protestant worship. At Florence—not to speak of the exile of its own noble Guicciardini for the crime of reading and loving the bible—the word of God can only be circulated by stealth, and under the constant terror of the Inquisition. In Rome, the seat of the Roman States, I need scarcely say the Scriptures rank among the list of prohibited books; and British protestantism is allowed the accommodation of a granary, scarcely within the walls, and over-looking the multiplied pollutions of a slaughter-house. But let a British minister of the gospel attempt to proclaim that gospel, in Rome, to Italians in their own tongue; let there be a condemnation of the errors and corruptions everywhere around him, though in the most measured words; let the tract or religious tract, excellent as they may be, be sent forth with a few statements of the simplest elements of revealed truth, be put in circulation; and arrest and the dungeon would be the speedy penalty. And all this at the moment when the Pope is claiming, for his spiritual subjects in England, not only liberty but privilege; when his votaries here are talking of the irascible rights of conscience; when he is seeking to erect a cathedral in the centre of London that shall eclipse St. Paul's, and is moving all Papal Europe by the most odious bribe of indulgence to supply the means, to that every stone in this building, as was once said of another ecclesiastical structure, shall represent a sin. Is this to be tamely endured? Is there to be no demand of reciprocity? Is conscience to have no rights at Rome? Or, if we should hold our peace and remain inactive in such circumstances, would not even the stones of London cry out?

All the general statements I have now made are more than borne out by the experience of an English clergyman—so lately as April of the