

Popery and Protestantism in the Riviera.

BY FRINCIAL DOUGLAS, D.D.

When I have been looking at the working of the Roman Catholic Church here, I have seen it reverting to type. Conversions to it from heathenism were often made, for centuries, by yielding to heathen practices, tolerating them, adopting them, adorning them with new names, corrupting the Gospel of Christ so as to make room for heathens within the Church. No doubt there was worldly wisdom in this. But the result has been that the heathenism remained behind to debase the Christianity with which it had been amalgamated, and to injure the people who had received the name of Christians. I stayed for nearly four months at four French towns in the Riviera: first, at Hyeres; then at Cannes, not quite eighty miles east of it, then at Nice, scarcely twenty miles farther on; and, lastly, at Mentone, fifteen miles farther on still, close to Italy. At what I may call an outlying suburb of Hyeres on the seashore, named Coste-Belle, I saw the very prominent church of Notre Dame, dedicated, that is to say, to Our Lady. Around the walls inside there are multitudes of expressions of thankfulness for benefits received. They are mostly of an outward kind, health recovered, accidents prevented or compensated for, etc. I did not see one of these thanksgivings addressed to God, or to our Lord Jesus Christ; I think almost all, if not all, were to the Virgin. A similar want of acknowledgment to the Saviour, or to His Father, appeared in the multitude of similar thanksgivings inscribed in the parish church of Hyeres itself. Men may bestow what approbation they please on the church-theory which distinguishes the service offered to the Virgin and that to the saints from the worship offered to Christ and to God; but in practice the only observable difference is, that Mary and the saints exclude God from the worshipper's view when he prepares these memorial tablets for the walls of the churches.

At Cannes I did not see that things were any better. At Nice, in the cathedral, I read this inscription over one of the altars, "*Jesu, Joseph, Maria, adeste nobis in extrema via*," which, I suppose, I may translate, "Jesus, Joseph, Mary, be ye present with us at the close of life's journey." Contrast this language with the Psalmist's: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff comfort me." At all events we have here what might be reckoned the present-day Trinity of popular adoration—namely, Jesus, Joseph, and Mary.

I saw in that same cathedral at Nice, at a shrine and an altar close by the place where I read that inscription, the list of members of the fraternity of "St. Joseph Agonisant," I suppose that is St. Joseph in agony, whatever this may mean; and on the other side of the shrine the list of members of the children of Mary. For here was "the privileged altar of the Queen conceived without original sin."

I was no less pained when, at Mentone, on the outside face of one of the principal churches, dedicated "To the Mother of mercies, who bore God, and to St. John the beheaded,"—I read the words "In me is all the hope of life." These words cannot apply to any one else than the Virgin Mary. Yet how can all the hope of life be said to be in her without flatly contradicting the statements of Scripture?

I have given you fair samples of the popular and current teaching to be met with uncontradicted and universally at one centre after another among the towns of Provence, whose name, "the Province," reminds us that it is the part of Gaul which the Romans first subdued, and the part most influenced by them. It is the part of France which touches Italy, and which is ever in closest contact with Rome, the so-called Apostolic See. Nor is it an out-of-the-way and unimportant corner of France. It is on the high-road of communication between France and Italy, the two greatest Roman Catholic countries. The rich and well-educated and influential classes dwell in it, or pass along it. Also its influence in the religious world is neither a new nor a small thing. For the feelings of Scotchmen with reference to Iona, in a sense the home of our Scottish religion and of our evangelistic efforts far beyond our

own land, are rivalled by the feelings with reference to the isles of Lerins, which lie close to the coast of Provence at Cannes. In these islands the great St. Honoratus and his sister St. Margaret founded their religious houses about the time when Rome was taken by the Goths, and when Augustine was the ornament and strength of Latin Christianity. The abbot of Lerins sent out its missionaries, its preachers, its prelates through at least all the southern part of Gaul. And among others of its theologians, Vincentius Lerinensis was he who composed that famous formula of so-called Catholic Christianity, *Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*."

Now, what of Protestantism? In it also is there reversion to type? Yes, surely. We speak of the three-one God whom we worship—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets, by diverse portions and in diverse manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son." And the Holy Spirit, by whose inspiration this Word was given at the first, works in us so as to bring it home to each of us in our life.

Protestant churches have many a time presented very disappointing and unlovely objects for contemplation. Take Roman Catholic countries such as France, of which I have been speaking. There was a time at which one-third of the French people were Protestants; and this Protestant minority was far more important than even its numbers suggest—in wealth, in intelligence, in moral character, and in religious earnestness. No one, in fact, need have been surprised though France had become a Protestant country. Now, on the contrary, since Alsace has been lost by France and has been regained by Germany, the Protestants are insignificant in number, not two per cent. of the population; yet still their influence is great, far more than proportioned to their numbers. But it is manifest that the small and scattered churches have a severe struggle for existence; and the real wonder is that they have life in them to make any efforts for the evangelization of their country. . . . While I say this, I add that I have seen in Protestantism, abroad as well as at home, the need for carefully clinging to the living Christ, and for refusing to cheat oneself and others by substituting the acceptance of sound theological beliefs for personal trust in the Saviour who died for us and rose again. It is so far a healthy sign that we so often hear the cry, "Back to Christ!" and are reminded that, without Christ Himself, Christianity is an empty shell. This is a return to the position of the great Puritans. In their writings you will find this duty pressed as earnestly as you ever hear it to-day. If any one has yielded to a prejudice, and has fancied that he will show his own superior sense and ability, say by refusing to acquaint himself with such a master in theology as John Owen, he cannot do better than study Owen's writings, that he may learn about the person and glory of Christ, and the person and work of the Holy Spirit. No really good student can let himself be repelled by the mannerisms of the Puritan age. Read the works of such well-instructed scribes in the kingdom of God, men who were so greatly honored in winning souls, and in making their country holy and happy. When you have mastered one of them, drop his mannerisms and reproduce his substance in the style of your own day.

I know that there is a pretence of reverting to type in some of our so-called Protestantism when it attempts to set the living Christ in opposition to the words of His apostles and other servants. Hold firmly that mere words are not to be mistaken for Christ, as I have just said. Hold firmly that no theological phrases can save yourselves or those who hear you. But do not for one moment listen to men who would make a difference between what came directly from the mouth of Christ and what has come to us from men to whom Christ gave their commission, and who, after His death and resurrection, delivered His message with a fullness and distinctness which could not be before He had made atonement for our sins upon the cross, and before He had given the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

In the French-speaking churches I am sorry to say that I think I see tendencies in this direction on the part of some teachers. The consequences of such