



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. IV.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, MARCH 10, 1854.

NO. 30.

MORALITY AND RELIGION OF ENGLAND.

(From the Metropolitan.)

The controversy between Catholicism and Protestantism is gradually abandoning—if, indeed, we might not more truly say has actually abandoned—the field of theological speculation and dispute, and is carried on at the present day rather in the arena of moral, social, and political life. The most notorious of Protestant theologians no longer make any attempt to settle the dispute by an appeal to Biblical texts, to the writings of the Fathers, or to ecclesiastical history; but they seek both to satisfy themselves, and to influence the popular mind, by an appeal to the more material tests of man and human society. "Which of the two religions," they inquire, "works best?—which has done most to promote the interests of humanity? Under which system do the arts and sciences, and all that is usually understood by the word civilization, most flourish? In a Catholic country, or in a Protestant? Which nations are the most advanced, the happiest and the strongest, in our own time; those which have adhered to the ancient faith, or those which have adopted the new?" These are the questions which one hears on all sides, far more frequently than we hear discussions upon the meaning of a text in St. Paul, or the authenticity of a passage quoted from St. Basil or St. Austin. And we need hardly say how such questions are answered. "Look at home," it is said; "England alone suffices to solve the problem at once and for ever. Is she not Protestant? And is she not a great and powerful nation? Did she not make the Crystal Palace? And did not the inhabitants of all the nations of the earth flock together on that memorable occasion to acknowledge her greatness and to do her homage? And at a still earlier period, at a time when every other country was shaken by internal convulsions, and all the most ancient thrones of Europe were tottering to their base, did not she alone preserve 'an even and unruffled mien,' not only weathering the storm in perfect safety herself, but offering also a secure asylum to all who suffered shipwreck elsewhere, whether kings or people?" No one can have mixed in Protestant society or listened to Protestant lectures, or read Protestant publications, within the last two or three years, without hearing this argument over and over again, reproduced in every possible variety of shape and language.

It is not our intention in the following pages to offer any remarks upon this form of the controversy, to enter into discussion with those persons who would "make the standard of civil prosperity or political aggrandisement the truest test of grace and greatest measure of salvation;" but there is yet another field upon which a few of the more reckless champions of Protestantism have lately ventured to enter, and into which we are disposed to follow them for a brief space; not indeed with any purpose of taking up the glove, and instituting in our present article that strict examination which we should wish to do of all the merits of the question at issue, but rather for the sake of making a few preliminary observations of the ground which our adversaries occupy. The persons to whom we allude boldly claim for England the merit of being the most moral and religious people in the world. Some of our readers will scarcely credit, perhaps, that so monstrous an absurdity can ever have been seriously propounded; nevertheless it is really so; and in what follows, therefore, we propose to take a hasty peep at this state of English morality and religion, which is considered so excellent and so fitting a subject of national boasting.

According to the *Post-Office Directory* in 1841, *Chambers's Journal* informs us that there were more shops in London devoted to the sale of intoxicating liquors than there were shops devoted to the sale of the necessaries of life. The number of butchers, and bakers, and dairymen, and cheesemongers, and grocers, and greengrocers and fishmongers, taken all together, was 10,790; the number of public-house keepers 11,000. In forty cities and towns in Scotland, we learn from the same authority, that the proportion is still greater; the dram-shops are to be found about 1 to every 150 persons of the population; bakers' shops about 1 to every 1,000 and booksellers' shops about 1 to every 2,300. Then, as to the use that is made of these shops and the consequences that flow from them; in the district visited by Mr. Vanderkiste (being part of the parish of Clerkenwell), he tells us that, "speaking with the utmost caution, two out of three adults on the district appear to be drunkards." (p. 48). This, of course, is no fair representation of the whole of London; at the same time we may observe, on the authority of Mr. Kay, that there is no doubt drunkenness is considerably on the increase; "The habit of drunkenness," he says, "pervades the masses of the operatives to an extent never before known in this country." During the last thirty years, the consumption of spirituous liquors

amongst us has increased in a ratio more than double that of the population; the use of opium also is increasing with rapidity. In 1850 the import was 103,711 lbs.; in 1852, 951,702 lbs. Let us look at Edinburgh and Glasgow: there has been lately a sufficiently amusing quarrel between those cities as to which of the two is most addicted to an inordinate use of intoxicating liquors. The details of this dispute have been in the daily papers, and there has been much discussion as to the accuracy of the figures; but after listening to all the recriminating accusations on both sides, and making all reasonable deductions, it appears that there were in Edinburgh 9,318 cases of drunkenness in one year among a population of 166,000, and in Glasgow 26,000 cases among 333,657; that is, in Edinburgh there was 1 case to every 18 persons, and in Glasgow 1 to every 13; and these, be it remembered, are known, ascertained, publicly registered cases of drunkenness; we have no statistics of those who get drunk in their own parlors or in the private houses of friends.

But let us pass from this disgusting topic, to look at other crimes against the moral law for which this exemplary country is becoming more and more distinguished. We will not dwell on the atrocious murders of husbands and wives, and brothers and sisters, committed in most instances for the sake of getting certain burial fees, that (as one of our correspondents recently observed) "have earned for two counties the enviable title of the 'poisoning counties';" let us speak only of that most unnatural of all crimes, the murder of children by their own mothers. We saw it stated not long since in some Protestant journal, that this crime was becoming almost as common as pocket-picking, and that there were on an average three cases of child-murder per day. Our first impression on reading this was, that the writer, for some rhetorical purpose, was dealing in statistics after the *Hobart Seymourian* fashion; and if he meant to speak only of those cases which come before the public in a regular and official way, of course the statement is very much exaggerated. But when we remember the facts that came out in evidence before the police court in London, in the case of a recent clerical delinquent and his medical assistants; when we hear the coroner of one of our large manufacturing cities (Leeds) publicly expressing his belief that 300 children are annually made away with, either before or after their birth, within the limits of his own jurisdiction, and the medical man engaged on the inquest coinciding in that opinion; when we find one of our London newspapers (the *Morning Chronicle*) giving its readers a list of twenty-two trials, for child-murder alone, that had been reported in its columns, and these were stated to be but one-half of those that had taken place in the short period of twenty-seven days; lastly, when we observe how in one of these cases common cause was made with the murderess by a large number of the girls of the country, who attended the trial in crowds, and when the prisoner was acquitted, publicly testified their joy, and left the assizes' town boasting "that they might now do as they liked;"—when we call to mind these and similar facts, we fear that the journalist alluded to was strictly within the mark in the dreadful statement we have quoted. Look again at another class of crimes—brutal outrages and assaults upon defenceless women and children; these have been so much on the increase among us of late years, that a member of the House of Commons has thought it necessary to introduce into parliament a bill for the special protection of that class of persons. In his speech on the occasion, he alluded to some half dozen cases of recent occurrence, which had been the immediate cause of his interesting himself in the matter; but one of the leading journals, in commenting upon the speech, complained that he had not availed himself of a quarter of the materials which were ready to his hand for demonstrating the necessity for such a measure, and immediately enumerated more than twenty other instances occurring in the last two months, and in London alone, that had been recorded in its own pages, and in which the most foul and savage attacks had been made by husbands and fathers on their wives (or paramours) and children: so that our readers will probably agree with us in thinking, that it is not without reason that a recent American writer observed that "there is probably more brutality towards women in England than in any other country in Europe, except perhaps Russia."

Then, again, look at offences of a wholly different kind and of a less heinous character: witness the revelations that have been made respecting the almost universal practice of adulterating even the most necessary articles of food; look at the acts of quackery and puffing in well-nigh every department, whether of commerce or of intellect, which is so eminently a characteristic of the present age; look at the bribery and corruption the dishonest erasions and

shufflings that have been brought to light in all quarters, high and low, by the investigations of parliamentary committees;—look at these things, and at a thousand others of the same kind, and then say whether England has not a right to be proud of its morality, and to boast itself over other nations, for an unquestionable superiority in this respect.

Moreover, it must be remembered that, after all, facts like these, which are registered in the political, annals and criminal statistics of a country, are by no means a complete and sufficient index to the degree of moral depravity that may exist. There may be the utmost licentiousness of life and the most thorough absence of all moral principle; and yet no overt acts may be committed which can be recorded by the public press, or which call for the penal action of the law of the land.

"The statistics of crime," it has been truly said, "cannot develop in half or in a quarter of its fearful extent the general state of depravity among the lower class in the great metropolis, or one of our manufacturing towns; they can never trace the monster-roots of vice, how widely they spread and diverge themselves, or how deep they penetrate in the congenial soil. The delinquencies which figure in the calendars are but the effervescence, the scum on the surface; the great mass of iniquity is at the bottom and out of sight. Even the imagination is overtaken when called upon to exert her powers, so as to produce a picture of demoralised humanity that shall be adequate to the truth. The real condition of many parts of such localities is not merely barbarism and heathenism, but can only be fitly designated by some term which includes those, and yet more of degradation; it is—what is worse—civilization uncivilized; humanity, with its external opportunities of action enlarged, to be the more imbruted; a scene in which a knowledge of religion is only proved by blasphemy; and the resources of an enlightened and emancipated age (!) are perverted to sin."

We will not attempt to lift the veil that covers those depths of iniquity that are here alluded to; we will only just mention one single fact, which could be attested, if necessary, by the evidence of a thousand witnesses, but which is most briefly and emphatically stated by the author whom we last quoted, in the following words. Mr. Worsley, a clergyman of the Establishment, of considerable experience, is speaking of the state of our large manufacturing towns and of the causes that have produced it; and after mentioning some of these, he says: "Hence originated a state of things which has attained its climax in our age, by the almost total eradication of the very semblance of modesty, in either sex, among the poor within the circle of the manufacturing centre." (p. 85.) In another place he speaks of the state of morality in the agricultural districts with reference to the same most important particular, and he uses nearly the same language: "The almost universal absence," he says, "of chastity and purity among the laboring class, in our country villages at the present day, is notorious to every one at all acquainted with them." (p. 68.) Would that we could see cause to dissent from this judgment, thus summarily passed upon the whole working population of Protestant England, whether engaged in agriculture or in manufactures: but on the contrary, we find every where, both in facts and in books, only too much that confirms its truth. And yet this is the country which boasts of its morality, and which collects funds and employs agents to promote the "moral and religious improvement of Ireland;" the *moral improvement* of a country, the purity and modesty of whose women wring even from the most unwilling lips the meed of admiring praise.

"The three countries in the world in which the Gospel is most faithfully preached," says a Protestant "are, England, the United States of North America, and the Protestant States in the North of Europe."

"It is the English people alone, alone in the old world," says another, "that is now Christian. One might almost say that, just now, the British people stands among the nations as the surviving trustee of Christianity, or as the residuary legatee of its benefits. Christianity, in its migrations through eighteen centuries, has betaken itself to the British people, as if these were its own, and that these, under its influence and at its inspirations, have become such as they are, if not the most highly educated among the nations, yet the most effective, the most beneficent, the most humane, and the people to whose purposes and labors the world looks for whatever is good and hopeful. As to the old world, and forgetting the new, the question of Christianity is almost an insular question—it is a British interest."

Well, then, let us see how the people of Britain attend to this insular question, this British interest; let us inquire with what honesty and with what diligence they administer these precious blessings, whereof they are the surviving trustee. Mr. Van-

derkiste shall answer this question with regard to that section of the British people with whom he had the most intimate acquaintance: "I am reluctantly compelled to conclude," he says "from years of observation, that the majority of persons on my late district were heathens and infidels" (p. 116.) Again, he speaks in another place more generally concerning the whole mass of the English poor, at least in London. "It has been a favorite phrase of some minds, to term the Established Church the Church of the poor, and with others to speak of Methodism as the poor man's religion; but the fact is, heathenism is the poor man's religion in the metropolis." (p. 14.) "Socialism, infidelity, rationalism, and indifference prevail in every quarter to a fearful extent," is the description by another pen, of part of what M. V. calls, the most favored parish in London, Islington; and similar passages, from a thousand sources, might be multiplied *ad infinitum*. But from general statements like these, let us descend to the particular facts upon which they are based. It will be at once allowed that attendance upon public worship is one great test of the hold which religion has upon the people: not that all who come to church are necessarily devout Christians, for many may go from fashion, from idleness, or some other bad motive; but that those at least who habitually neglect the duty of public worship altogether can scarcely be said to be Christians at all. Now, judging by this test, what is the condition of the British people? "From statistics, very carefully collected five years since by the City Mission—statistics," says Mr. Vanderkiste, "which have been admitted as correct on all hands, it is ascertained that the attendance on public worship, in the metropolis, did not reach by one-third the accommodation provided, whilst the accommodation provided was less than one-half of what ought to be required and could be made use of, did all possessing the opportunity so to do attend," (p. 12;) that is to say, ten years ago, when the population of London was about two millions, it was calculated that about five-eighths, or 1,312,500 persons, might and ought to attend public worship in some church or chapel every Sunday; but church-accommodation, as it is called, was only provided for something less than half that number, say 600,000; and then of this accommodation only two-thirds were actually used; so that the whole church-going population was about 400,000. This is bad enough; but what makes it far worse, and still more appalling is, the consideration that this church-going population is made up almost entirely of the upper and more respectable classes, over whom the influences of fashion and of public opinion are of course the strongest: "The poor," says Mr. V., "in the dense mass are neglectors of public worship altogether." In the parish of Clerkenwell, containing more than 50,000 souls, the average attendance of the poor in the two parish churches is about eighty in each! and of these many were regular pensioners, or received occasional temporal relief.

"I do not believe," continues Mr. V., "that in the whole parish 100 poor people could be found attending public worship, who do not more or less frequently receive eleemosynary relief to induce them so to do. Thus, about one poor person in fifty occasionally attends public worship; or, where the attendance is regular, it arises generally from a share in the distribution of weekly bequests of bread."

Indeed this bribe of bread appears to be a regularly recognised and approved means, among our Protestant neighbors, of bringing people to church. We need not go to Ireland for our proofs; an advertisement in the *Times* newspaper, during the last winter, an appeal to the charitable, began with these words, "Thirty-two heads of families, who hitherto neglected their place of worship, are now regular attendants at St. Mark's, Horsleydown, in consequence of the incumbent being enabled to give them a few pounds of bread and coal." Yet, even with the aid of such potent auxiliaries as these, the result is a meagre attendance in the churches of one out of every fifty of the working population! Where are the rest? "They are either sopping," says the journal we have just quoted, in one of its most powerful leading articles, "or sleeping, or talking politics, or reading the Sunday papers, or fighting, or seeing their dogs fight, or rat-catching, or quarrelling with their wives, or simply doing nothing at all, being jaded, wearied, prostrated, in a sort of hebdomadal trance or coma." This is the state of the Protestant religion in London, according to the testimony of those who ought to know it best; and it cannot be doubted that it is a fair type of most of our large cities. We are far from being blind to the many foul blots that may occasionally be seen in the practical morality and religion either of Italians or of Irishmen; but we are satisfied that England will have great cause to rejoice when an impartial, or rather an unfavorable witness