

The True Witness.

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MONTREAL, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11.

NEWS OF THE WEEK

Whether it be from hatred of Russia, or simply from a desire to divert attention from the atrocities perpetrated by the Piedmontese upon Neapolitan patriots, we cannot pretend to say; but the British press is indefatigable in its denunciations of the cruelties to which the Poles are subjected. There are but two Governments in Europe that have resource to torture—that of the Czar, and that of Victor Emmanuel, the pet of the latter Liberals. Of the enormities which the British sanctions, and which his officers practise, the English press says nothing, but it is vehement in its expression of sympathy with the Poles.

This is the more noble on the part of the press, seeing that the British Government has quite plainly expressed its determination not to interfere between the Russians and their victims. Russia is a first-class Power, and must not therefore be rudely dealt with. Naples was, on the contrary, a weak Power, and therefore our rulers, as prudent as they are generous, deemed it their duty to foster treason, and actively encourage rebellion against the King of the Two Sicilies; but as for risking a war with the giant force of Russia, and for the sake of a few miserable Poles, who are Poles to boot, such a Quixotic enterprise is not for one moment to be thought of. With the Great Powers, England cannot afford at present to fight; she submits to be scolded by Gortchakoff, and eats humble pie at the bidding of the Cabinet of Washington. In revenge, she is very bold, almost truculent towards the Pope, who has no large army at his back, and from whose navy there is naught to fear.

Having made up its mind not to fight, the English Government, speaking in the name of the people, asks naturally enough what is the use of the Congress?—how could Great Britain therein take a part, seeing that if it does anything in behalf of the Poles, it must do something which will necessitate a war with Russia? All the arts and persuasions of diplomacy have been exhausted, but in vain, upon the stubborn Muscovite to persuade him to relax his hold upon Poland.—A Congress which should content itself with mere diplomatic remonstrances with the Czar, which should limit its action to the writing of Notes to that Sovereign, pointing out to him how very naughty his conduct was, how inconsistent with the obligations of the Treaty of Vienna, and the conditions upon which he wears the Crown of Poland, would be the laughing stock of Europe. "Notes" have already been tried, and have signally failed. Ruffled cannon and sharp bayonets are the only means by which any impression upon the minds of the Russians could be made, or any amelioration in the lot of the Poles effected; and Great Britain proclaims in advance, almost ostentatiously, that these means she does not intend to employ. Of what use then would it be for her to take part in a European Congress? unless indeed that Congress should announce to the world that it did not contemplate taking any means for giving effect to its decisions.

The Roman question also presents difficulties to the British Protestant mind, and renders it averse to the scheme of Louis Napoleon. The London Times in an editorial points out the antinomial position in which Great Britain would be placed by taking part in a Congress for regulating the affairs of Europe:—

"For instance, could the English Cabinet, in its answer to the invitation, possibly overlook such a difficulty, as would at once arise from the position of the King of Italy? Could it waive the discussion of a question so vitally important to the new Italian monarchy as the continued occupation of Rome by French troops? It could not be made a reserved question, and would certainly take a prominent and early place in the debate."

Which debate would but elicit the irreconcilable antagonism between the policy of Great Britain on the Italian question, and that of Austria and of Spain. But as a house divided against itself cannot stand, so a Congress which could not avoid divisions upon a question which would take an early and prominent place in its debates, would necessarily be ineffectual for any purpose for which a Congress could be convened. Austria would of course insist upon the integrity of her Venetian Provinces, and

would require guarantees that her rights should be respected; and this again would give rise to interminable dissensions. Upon the whole then it seem as if the proposal of Louis Napoleon was but what sailors call 'throwing a tub to the whale'—something to amuse Europe during the winter, and to distract attention from the real objects which the astute proposer has in view. That the Congress will ever meet appears exceedingly doubtful. The Emperor has indeed as yet received no positive refusal to the invitation he has issued; but then it has been accepted with so many conditions respecting the bill of fare, and the dishes that are to be set before the guests, that it is easy to see that of the invited to the banquet, many are only seeking for a decent excuse to absent themselves altogether.

Russia is arming, however, as it to prepare for the worst. She is putting Cronstadt in order, and is daily increasing its already formidable defences, and making additions to her fleet. Russia evidently believes in war. Out of the disputed succession to the Duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, another *casus belli* threatens to emerge. Several of the German Sovereigns, amongst others the Duke of Saxe-Cobourg Gotha, have recognised the hereditary right of Prince Augustenburg to the disputed Duchies; on the other hand, Great Britain and the other Powers will uphold the Treaty of May 5th, 1852, in virtue of which they descend to the present King of Denmark. The question of right is most intricate, and one that it is difficult to understand.—The rumored resignation of Lord Russell to make way for Lord Clarendon is now contradicted.

The European news in other respects is not of much interest. Victor Emmanuel has been trying to get up an ovation in Naples, and in spite of the strenuous exertions of his police and troops, has failed signally. He has also, as was fitting on the part of the Sovereign of an evangelised Italy, manifested his appreciation of the services which M. Renan has rendered to the Holy Protestant Faith, by conferring on the author of the "Life of Jesus" the Cross of St. Maurice.

The arguments in the Alexandra case had not been brought to a close when the last mails left England; and it was not expected that the judgment would be delivered before the beginning of January.

From Ireland it is still the same sad story of suffering, and emigration which no human power can now arrest. The Church question in one form or another also forms a constant topic of discussion; and from the tone of the British press on this subject, it may be expected that a formidable attack will be made in the Legislature on the monastic iniquity. At all events we may be sure that the state of Ireland will be made the subject of Parliamentary investigation. No inopportune "Jack-in-Office" can any longer conceal the fact of the sufferings of the peasantry, or prevent the Irish question from becoming the great Imperial question.

Gen. Meade, having as we announced in our last, gallantly marched towards General Lee, has in an equally gallant manner marched back again, without any great loss of men or material. He saw that the Southerners were stongly posted, and apparently did not like the look of them, for he at once and most prudently fell back to his old position. So has terminated his short campaign, and it is expected that his army will take up its winter quarters. The enemy still continue to throw shells into Charleston, and the siege languishes rather than progresses. The latest telegrams announce that General Meade is about to be relieved of his command, and that General Meagher has been arrested within the Confederate Lines, in civilian's dress. It is not stated whether the Confederates will treat him as a prisoner of war, or as a spy. The Federals, if the case were their's would show no mercy; but would hang at once any Confederate officer arrested within their Lines, and under such circumstances. The Congress of the Northern States has assembled, but the address of the President had not been made public up to the time of going to press.

THE BIBLE THE RELIGION OF PROTESTANTS.—How often have our ears been stunned with this silly cry! how often have we had it enforced upon us that "the Bible without note or comment" was the sole authority in religious matters that Protestants recognised, or to which they would submit themselves. There were no difficulties in the Bible we were told; it was all so plain and simple that the wayfaring man, though destitute of all education, might therein read and find the way of life. Or if there were any difficulties or obscure passages, these might always and easily be overcome and cleared up by other passages; for according to this theory the Bible was a self-interpreting book, and a sufficient commentary upon itself.

Alas for this theory! The progress of neology in England, the triumphant success which has attended the publication of "Essays and Reviews" and Dr. Colenso's criticisms on the Pentateuch, have dispelled the agreeable delusion; and convinced the Protestant world that, if Christianity is to be retained, the Bible, with-

out note or comment, must no longer be put into the hands of the people. "The Bible alone" can no longer be the "religion of Protestants;" and, as we learn from the *Guardian*, hence forward "an authorised commentary on the Bible" must be the religious guide or teacher of the English people.

It is to the Speaker of the House of Commons that the honor of originating this notable expedient for keeping within due bounds the erratic sheep of the Protestant fold, and for putting a wholesome curb upon the excesses of "private judgment," is due. Every man, interpreting Scripture for himself has evidently resulted in nothing but confusion; and so the Speaker of the House of Commons took sweet counsel together with several of the Government Bishops on the subject; and at his instance the gentleman who supports himself and family out of the revenues of the ancient Archbishopial See of York, has undertaken "to organise a plan for producing a commentary which should put the reader in full possession of whatever information may be requisite to enable him to understand the Word of God, and supply him with satisfactory answers to objections resting upon misrepresentation of its contents." "The plan," we are further told by the *Guardian*, "has received the sanction of the Primate." The services of many learned scholars, most of them holding government situations in the Establishment, have also been engaged for the great work—"a work," says the *Guardian*, "second only in importance to the LXX, or the English version made by the order of King James;" and which, so the *Guardian* suggests, will probably by future generations "be quoted as the XXX"—a title ludicrously suggestive of beer, to profane minds.

It may not perhaps suggest itself to the Protestant intellect as strange that, if "a commentary to put the reader of the Bible in possession of whatever information may be requisite to enable him to understand the Word of God," be necessary—God Himself should have left the originating of such an essential work to the Speaker of the House of Commons in the 27th year of the reign of Queen Victoria; and should have left His creatures whom He holds responsible for the right understanding of His Word, for nigh two thousand years destitute of a commentary requisite to enable them to understand that Word. The Catholic on the contrary will thus argue: Either such a commentary is unnecessary, and therefore the work originated by the Speaker of the House of Commons is a piece of sheer impertinence; or else it is necessary—in which case it is to be assumed, from the known justice and wisdom of God, that He, from the beginning has actually furnished His creatures with such a commentary, in the form of a living and ever divinely assisted body of teachers, called a Church.

The *Guardian* matters itself that the appearance of the commentary which it announces will stay the plague of neology, and arrest the onward march of infidelity. "The names of the editors and contributors while they ensure orthodoxy, give promise that the comment thus put forth almost with the sanction of the Church of England as a body, will not be the utterance of any narrow school or section of it." But even were it a commentary, put forth altogether with the sanction of the Church of England, what influence could it have over those who do not recognise in that body any spiritual authority? and whose utterances are to them but as the utterances of any other aggregation of fallible mortals interested in maintaining respect for a system through which they earn their bread and butter? Besides, the great questions which distract the Protestant world at the present moment do not relate to the interpretation of the Bible, but to the value of the Bible; but to its claims to be considered the Word of God, or inspired in any higher sense than that in which it is fashionable to apply that epithet to the utterances of earth's choicest spirits? to those of a Homer, a Dante and a Shakespeare, as well as to those of David and of Isaiah. What the Protestant world looks for, therefore, what it really stands in need of, is, not an assurance of the orthodoxy of the commentators, but of their authority, or right to lay down the law in the premises at all. What it requires is, not merely an interpretation of the Bible, but a guarantee that the Bible is, or contains, God's Word, and a clear, sharp explanation of the nature and extent of that inspiration which can rightfully be claimed for it. Even were it the case that all Protestants were agreed as to the latter point, did receive the Protestant Bible as verily and indeed the supernaturally inspired Word of God, and therefore without flaw or error of any kind—but differed amongst one another only as to the meaning of that Word—it is but little that the commentators though speaking in the name of the Church of England, could effect towards the settlement of religious difficulties—for who cares for the Church of England? or who recognises in it any right to teach? But such is not the case. Protestants differ, not only as to the meaning of the Bible, but as to the authority of the Bible: and far from unanimously admitting it to be the

Word of God at all, many of the most learned Protestants insist warmly that it contains innumerable errors, in history, and in geology; that it errs, not only in its cosmogony, but in its morality; that it misrepresents not merely man, but God; and that though it contains many sublime moral lessons, many passages of transcendent poetical beauty, and much valuable history, its utility is sadly impaired by the unfortunate admixture therein of fable, of extravagant myth and doubtful legends, which tend to discredit, or throw doubt upon its more sober details of fact. This is the view taken of the Bible by most educated and enquiring Protestants of the present day: and as we see not how the "ensured orthodoxy" of the contributors to the forthcoming "authorised commentary" can in any manner meet the objections which these Protestants propose, we fear that the exultation of the *Guardian* over the great and happy results to religion which are to follow the carrying out of the plan originated by the Speaker of the House of Commons, is to say the least premature. The work when it appears may display much diligent research, and contain some useful information in geology, chronology, ethnology, philology, history and physics: it may present us with some curious facts entitling it to rank amongst the "Curiosities of Literature"—for there can be no doubt that the names of many eminent British scholars are put down as connected with it: but as it does not, by its prospectus, pretend even to address itself to clearing away the difficulties which most forcibly present themselves to the rationalism, and neologistic tendencies of the age, it is easy to foresee that its influence—rehabilitating a belief in the Bible as the Word of God in the orthodox sense, will be imperceptible. In the meantime Catholics may congratulate themselves that the march of events, and the progress of Protestantism have effectually disposed of the absurd cry of "The Bible without note or comments is the religion of Protestants;" and have thus justified the wisdom of the Catholic Church in imposing certain restrictions upon the reading of the sacred writings by her uneducated children.

BRITISH AMERICAN REVIEW—December, 1863. E. Pickett, Montreal.—This is the eighth number of this periodical, and we hope that it may have many successors, since the *Review* is the result of an effort to supply a want long felt in the literary world of Canada.

In the preceding numbers of the *British American Review* have appeared articles on the future destiny of the British North American Provinces, and advocating the union of those Provinces under a regal form of government, independent of the British Crown. This idea is still further developed in the current number, in an article under the caption—*A Monarchy, Or A Republic; Which?* As it discusses questions to which before long Canada will have to give a definite answer; questions that are destined before long to become of practical importance, not to Canada alone, but to all the North American Colonies of Great Britain, it is entitled to a serious notice from all who interest themselves in the future of this country.

The writer assumes that the union of all the British North American Provinces is both desirable and feasible. We deny that it is desirable; and though it is of course feasible, we are of opinion that before it could become *in fact* accomplish many, obstacles, internal and external, moral and physical, would have to be encountered and overcome.

The great danger that menaces liberty in the New World, as in the Old, here, as in the United States, is centralisation. This is the enemy against which the illustrious Count Montalembert so eloquently and opportunely warned his hearers at the late Catholic Congress at Malines; this is the danger against which it behoves all lovers of freedom to be incessantly on their guard. Centralisation is the last word of democracy; and he who advocates it is—though, as in the case of the writer in the *British American Review*, perhaps unwittingly—the advocate of the cause of democracy and absolutism. We do not therefore look upon centralisation in British North America as desirable; neither do we deem it to be of easy attainment, seeing that there are serious ethnological and religious obstacles to such a union. Were the Provinces in question inhabited by one homogeneous race, inheritors of the same laws, language, religion and national traditions, there might be no serious internal obstacles to the accomplishment of a measure such as that which we are contemplating. But the fact—and facts are "stubborn chiefs"—is, that the population of British North America consists of at least two distinct races, whose fusion or union is ethnologically impossible. One race may in time obtain absolute supremacy over the other, but they will no more unite than will oil and water.

Our writer argues that no external obstacles to the formation of a great independent nationality out of the united Provinces of British North America are to be anticipated from the opposition of the United States. He thinks that their domestic troubles, their civil war, and embarrassed

finances, have left those States weak, and powerless for aggression upon their neighbors. So rashly, and illogically did British statesmen conclude in 1792, that France, distracted by revolution, anarchy, civil war, and financial bankruptcy had ceased to be a power formidable to Europe; nor could the most far-seeing politicians of that day detect in the violent social and political convulsions of a Republic, the prelude to, or the birth throes of the military tyranny of an Empire, to which ere long almost every country in Europe had to succumb. As it was with France, so we firmly believe that, no matter what the result of the present war, will it be with the United States. Henceforward they must be what they were not in any previous epoch of their career, what they could not be under their old Constitution—a terrible military power; a power only the more terrible because built up on the ruins of an ancient free constitution. The struggle with the South has developed the hitherto latent passion for war amongst the vast mass of the people; and, as in India the tiger that has once tasted human blood becomes an habitual man-eater, and the terror of all the villages in the vicinity, so no doubt will the people of the Northern States henceforward more and more abandon themselves to that lust for territory, and that passion for conquest which now incite them to the subjugation of the South. It needs no prophet to predict, that the centralisation which must follow the crushing out of State Rights, and that the democratic principles which are now in the ascendant amongst our neighbors, must ere long make of them one of the most formidable military powers in the world, even as the same causes made the France of Napoleon far more formidable to Europe than was the France of Louis XIV. Never, we say, were the Yankees so much to be dreaded as they are at present, now that they have discarded their ancient constitutional freedom, for military despotism, and the old "common law" of England for modern Caesarism. They are possessed by the same dread fiend as that which in the last generation drove the giant shoeless peasantry of France to the frontiers, and which, lashing them into frenzy enabled them to effect an easy conquest over their less excited neighbors; and though as yet they may have produced no Carnot who can "organise victory;" no little lieutenant of artillery to reduce Yankee Jacobinism to a system, though in short the "coming man" has not yet declared himself, we may be sure that he is, and that at the fitting moment he will make himself seen and felt.

For those reasons we do not believe that our neighbors would allow the creation on their Northern border of an alien nationality. To them, no matter how the affair with the South terminates, the command of the navigation of the St. Lawrence from the Lakes to the Sea must become a matter of highest political and fiscal necessity; and though as a temporary arrangement, they might submit with patience to the continuance of the colonial system of government—just as men will wait for the pear until it is ripe—we are confident that in their present temper, they would not, without a fight, tolerate such a scheme of union as that which the *Review* proposes. Every Yankee looks upon the provinces of British North America, as destined to form part of his Union; and a policy having for its avowed end or object, the destruction of this pleasant vision would be certain to meet with the opposition of our powerful and by no means scrupulous neighbors.

And if the union of all the Provinces of British North America appear to us by no means desirable; if the establishment of a new and distinct nationality in this quarter of the globe seem to us to be impossible, the project of introducing the regal, or in vulgar parlance—the monarchical form of government for the peoples by whom those united Provinces would be inhabited, strikes us as a proposition as wild as any ever broached within the walls of Bedlam.—The myrtle, the olive, and the orange tree might be successfully transplanted to the Arctic regions; the vine might profitably be cultivated on the shores of the Polar Sea; and the banana brought to perfection amidst the everlasting snows of the farthest North, with greater ease than could the peculiar political institutions, or any copy of those institutions of aristocratic England be made to take root, and bring forth fruit in such an unpropitious soil as is that of British North America.

LIBERALISM AND CHRISTIANITY.—As an index to the relative positions of Liberalism and Christianity, we may cite the action of the Liberal party in Paris, who are about to bring out as a candidate for the honor of representing them the author of the "Life of Jesus." M. Renan's sole claims upon the Liberal party are these: that he has renounced or protested against the Catholic Church, and that he has written a book of which it is hard to say whether it be the more blasphemous or the more silly. Yet in that he hates Christianity, the Liberals feel intuitively that M. Renan is one of themselves, a worthy fellow-laborer with Garibaldi and the other Apostles of the Revolution.