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TRACTS FOR THE MILLION.

HOW DID ENGLAND BECOME CATHOLIC? AND HOW DID ENGLAND BECOME PROTESTANT?

INTRODUCTION.

How Certain Travellers forsook their Guides, and how they fared with them.

A company of travellers were once journeying towards a great city in the East. Their road lay through a dangerous country, and was rather intricate; but they had a good party of guides who seemed perfectly at home in it, and so they went fearlessly and steadily on. However, the way was far from being as smooth and easy as the travellers would have liked it to be; it led them some times through thorny brakes, and almost always was on an ascent, sometimes a very steep one. This did not at all suit the taste of some of the travellers, who began to complain, and to whisper to one another that they had very serious doubts whether this difficult, disagreeable road was the right one. "Depend upon it," said one, "these guides are taking us wrong, and bringing us into all these difficulties, just to make themselves of consequence, and to make a demand upon us afterwards for more pay." "And, after all," said another, "what do we want of guides? You see they have each a map of the country in their hands: if we had but that, we could find our way for ourselves just as well as they can tell it us, and much better." At this bright thought they were much delighted; and seizing several copies of the map, they knocked down such of the guides as attempted to offer any resistance, and set off across the country to find out the right road by themselves. But though they were all together in the same place at the moment when they did this, and although the copies of the map which they had seized were all exactly alike, yet, as soon as they began to move forward, they immediately took different directions, so that in a few minutes they were completely scattered. Some, indeed, steadily followed the few guides who survived, and these kept close together, just as they had travelled on from the first; but of the rest scarcely any two chose the same path; one darted off in this direction, another in that, each all the while shouting out that he was right and the rest wrong; and what seemed most strange, each confidently appealing to the map he held in his hand in proof of what he said. Yet, as you have already heard, it was the self-same map, of which they all had good and perfect copies; but somehow or other, they each contrived to understand its lines and colors differently. Perhaps there was some key to it which they did not possess, or did not know how to use; but this is a part of their history which we are not going to inquire about to-day. I will only add, that when those travellers, who had remained faithful to the old guides, saw all this disturbance amongst those who had deserted them,—when they saw how some sunk into hidden pits and disappeared altogether, while the rest still kept on shouting, and running hither and thither,—they congratulated one another very heartily that they had not been seduced into following the example of the runaways, whose chance of reaching the great city they thought not much to be depended on.

Now, is not the state of the people of this country at the present moment with reference to matters of religion, very much the same as that of these runaway travellers with reference to their knowledge of the road in which they ought to travel? We are all agreed,—at least all for whom these pages are intended,—that God has revealed to man the way of truth; nay, we have our map of the road; there is a book in the hands of every one of us, which we are all agreed in calling the Word of God, and which, as some of us say, contains this way of truth so plainly, fully, and distinctly taught, that there can be no mistake about it; and yet as to what that way of truth is, we hold as many different opinions as did those travellers as to the right road. Moreover, in one very serious respect, we are far worse off than the travellers; there may be more than one road leading to a city; but there cannot—if God has really revealed any religion at all—there cannot be more than one religion that is true. Any how, two roads leading in opposite directions, cannot both end in the same place; and two religious doctrines which contradict each other cannot, by any possibility, both be true.

Yet we meet with such contradictions in doctrine at every step in this country, and that on points which are of real, living consequence to us all. To take only one instance: we most of us carry our little infants to be baptized; and any mother whose thoughts go deeper than the mere external ceremony, would naturally wish to know what good she may expect her child to receive from it. Let her ask her religious neighbors: some will tell her that the child

is cleansed in this water from the stain of sin which he has inherited from Adam; others will say that this is quite a mistake, that the child gets no good at all, that it is a mere ceremony; others, again, will tell her that it is wrong to baptize her children whilst they are so young, she should wait till they are grown up and able to think and judge for themselves; and, lastly, there are others who will not hesitate to assure her that they ought never to be baptized at all.

This is only one point among a thousand that might be selected; but it is a very important one; and even if it were the only point on which there was a difference of opinion, it would be extremely puzzling to any who trouble themselves to think about religion at all. What shall we say, then, when we consider that there is not a single doctrine upon which there is not a similar variety of opinions; when we are not even agreed on the one great doctrine which, one would think, must concern the very foundation of our religion; I mean, as to whether our blessed Lord Jesus Christ is God as well as man?

Now this is so strange a state of things, that one cannot help asking whether it was always so; whether the Christian religion made its first appearance in this country in that motley dress and with that discordant voice which it now has; or, if not, how it became such as it now is among us? In other words, we would ask two plain and simple questions: first, How did England become Christian? and, secondly, How did it become Protestant?

HOW DID ENGLAND BECOME CHRISTIAN?

Thirteen hundred years ago—that is, five hundred and fifty years after our Lord's birth—England was a heathen country. I do not mean to say, that there was not a single Christian in it: there were a few; but those few had been driven into the mountains of Wales and Cornwall by the Angles, or Anglo-Saxons, our forefathers, from whose name we are now called English. These Angles were pagans, and they were not the first inhabitants of this country, but had come over from their own land, Germany, on pretence of helping the native people, the Britons, against their enemies, the Scots. This they really did at first; but afterwards they turned their arms against the Britons themselves, and step by step, conquered the whole island, making a dreadful slaughter of the people, and driving such of them as were left into those parts which I have mentioned. Whether these few Christian natives were afraid to come out and show themselves, or whether they were not very zealous about their religion, I cannot say; any how it is certain, that, from some cause or other, they did not exert themselves to convert the heathen people who had conquered them. The whole of England, excepting only Wales and a part of Cornwall, lay in utter heathen darkness and ignorance, in the year of our Lord 596.

One day, however, early in the spring of the following year, there landed on the coast of the island of Thanet, in Kent, a company of venerable men, about forty in number, clad in long black habits, with one at their head, whom they seemed all to reverence and obey; and as soon as they were landed, they sent messengers, (whom they brought from France as interpreters,) to the king of the country, telling him that they were come from Rome, the bearers of glad tidings, which, if he would but hear them, would bring him to never-ending happiness after death. The king, whose name was Ethelbert, seems to have guessed immediately what this meant; for, though he was himself a heathen, he had yet heard of the Christian religion, because he had a Christian wife, called Bertha, a princess from France. Therefore he sent a courteous message to the strangers, praying that they would remain in the island where they had landed, and where he gave directions that they should receive all hospitality, and promised soon to visit them.

Accordingly, after a few days, the king went to the island with a great company of people, and invited the strangers to a conference, sitting in the open air; for, from some superstitious fancy, he was afraid of meeting them under a roof. They came then into his presence, one of them bearing a silver cross for their standard, and another a picture of our blessed Lord; and all with one voice singing litanies, and praying to God for their own salvation and that of the people to whom they had come. Then, at the king's command, they sat down; and their chief, who was called Augustin, preached, by means of his interpreters, the gospel of Christ to the king and all his nobles; and the king made him a kind and wise answer, that the words he had spoken seemed of blessed promise; but that they were new to him, and that he could not leave his old religion for a new one, without understanding the reason of the case; since, however, he could not doubt but that the reverend strangers really believed themselves what they desired to teach him, and had nothing in view but his own good and that of his people, he would not injure them, but rather

receive them with due hospitality, and in no way hinder them from preaching the faith.

And he certainly did receive them with princely hospitality, for he set apart for their use a large mansion in Canterbury, which was the capital city of his kingdom, and provided for them maintenance, giving them at the same time, as he had promised, full liberty to teach and to preach. They went, therefore, to the city of Canterbury, carrying before them, as at their landing, the cross and the picture of our Lord, and chanting with one voice this prayer: "We pray thee, O Lord, of Thy great mercy, that Thy fury and Thine anger may be turned away from this city, and from Thy holy house; for we have sinned. Alleluia."

When thus established in Canterbury, we are told that they led an apostolic life, in fastings, in watchings, and in continual prayer; and preached the Word of God to as many as they could reach, despising the things of this world, as matters in which they had no concern, and receiving from those whom they taught just what was needful to their daily food, and no more. And the result of all this was, that many, admiring the innocence of their lives and the heavenly sweetness of their teaching, believed and were baptized; and the king himself, before long, having searched out the truth of their doctrine, was convinced, gave up his idols, and became a Christian. He was then, of course, earnestly desirous that his people also should receive the true faith; but this he left entirely to their own conscience, for he had been taught by those who had instructed him in the Christian faith, that the service of Christ must be, not enforced, but of free-will. However, it was not long before he had the happiness of seeing his whole kingdom, or at least great numbers in it, become Christian;—and then Augustin according to commands which he had received—not from the king, but from some one else, whom we shall mention presently—went over to France, to the Archbishop of Arles, and by him was consecrated the first Archbishop of Canterbury.

Thus was the seed of the faith first sown among our forefathers; and soon it grew up into a great tree; for, before a hundred years had passed, the country was Christian from sea to sea, and the whole nation of the Angles, as we are told, praised God "with one heart and with one voice."

We may gather from what has been said, 1, that the Christianity which was thus gladly received by our forefathers was one religion, not many, for it was first preached by one company of men living all together; and 2, that it was one with the religion of other countries, or else Augustin would scarcely have gone into France to be made Bishop. Here, then, are two respects in which it was mightily unlike English Christianity of the present day, for that is altogether different from the Christianity of all other countries, and also altogether divided against itself.

What, then, was the Christianity of Augustin? Who were he and his company? Whence did they come, and who sent them?

To this I answer, that their Christianity was the Catholic faith,—that they themselves were Catholic monks,—that they came from Rome,—and that they were sent by the Pope.

Impossible, you will say; if they had been Catholics, they would not have prayed to God, as we hear they did, but to images of wood and stone; still less would they have taught King Ethelbert to leave his people's religion to their own consciences; on the contrary, they would certainly have made him torture and burn them; indeed, if they had been Catholics, so wise and good a king as Ethelbert would never have received them at all;—and, as to the Pope having sent them, we know that he is Antichrist, and how could Antichrist send missionaries to bring people to the worship of Christ?

Ah, these are difficulties which I cannot attempt to answer all in a minute; indeed, I shall not attempt at present to give a direct answer to any of them; I would only just beg of you to reflect whether you are quite sure that all these statements are true. Are you quite sure that Catholics pray to graven images, instead of God? Are you quite sure that the Catholic religion is cruel and intolerant? Are you quite sure that the Pope is Antichrist? However, whether you are sure of these things or not, and whether these things really are so or not, makes no difference to our present history. Any how, it is certainly and undeniably true, that Augustin and his companions were Catholic monks, and that they came from Rome, and that it was the Pope who sent them.

Who was this Pope, then? and how came he to send missionaries to England, to convert our heathen forefathers to Christianity?

There was a man named Gregory, a Roman by birth, and of noble family, who in the bloom of youth, wishing to give himself up entirely to the service of Christ, retired from the world into a monastery in Rome, which still exists, and where the very rooms

he inhabited, the very table at which he used to feed the poor, and many other memorials of him, may still be seen. Here he labored by prayer and obedience to perfect his soul in holiness, and so far succeeded, that, as we are told, all worldly things seemed to be under his feet, and his spirit burst, as it were, the prison of the flesh through holy contemplation. However, he was not only a very spiritually-minded man, but also a man of great talent; and so he could not be left in peace in his monastery, but was sent by those whom he was bound to obey to the great city of Constantinople, on some business to the Roman emperor, whose court was held there. But he was so afraid of his soul losing in the world some of the holiness it had gained in retirement, that he used to keep always near him some brethren he had brought from the monastery; and with them he devoted to prayer and study every moment he could spare from business. At last, to his great joy, he was allowed to return to Rome.

One day he was walking in the forum, or market place at Rome, which is not very far from his monastery, and he saw standing there, to be sold as slaves, a group of young boys, whom he knew at once, from their golden hair, blue eyes, and fair blooming cheeks, were not Italian. He asked who they were; and when he was told that they were from the distant island of Britain, and belonged to a pagan people, who were all of the same complexion, he sighed deeply, and said, "What a pity that men of such radiant countenances should be in the power of the spirits of darkness!" And then having inquired their name, and being told that they were called Angles, "Angles?" he said, "Angels, rather,—if they were but Christian." From the moment of that accidental meeting, the longing wish to turn that people of fair-haired strangers to the faith of Christ, was uppermost in Gregory's heart. His first desire was to come himself to preach to them; and this he attempted to do; but the Roman people, by whom he was much beloved, would not hear of his leaving the city; so he was obliged for a time to forego his charitable purpose.

At last, however, strange as it may seem to you, this good, loving, holy man was made Pope. And then, as he had full power to send missionaries wherever he pleased, his first care was to dispatch Augustin and his companions to England. They did not much like the prospect of their work; because, in the first place, they had a new, and what they considered a barbarous language to learn; and, in the next place, all they heard of our forefathers themselves was not very encouraging; for, if the truth must be told, I am afraid they were not at that time much better than barbarians. Discouraged by these considerations, they actually sent back messengers to Gregory, after they had gone some way on their journey, to beg to be let off. But he would not hear of it; on the contrary, telling them to remember what our Lord has said, that he who putteth his hand to the plough and looketh back, is not worthy of the kingdom of God, he encouraged and commanded them to persevere; and it was by his command also, both that Augustin, when he had succeeded in converting so large a number from the kingdom of Kent, went over to Arles to be consecrated, and also that the Archbishop of Arles consecrated him.

And now one word more before we close this first part of our subject. How came the Pope to have such power, that he could send Augustin and his brethren hither and thither as he pleased? and that he could command the Archbishop of Arles to consecrate Augustin Bishop? and how came they all to obey him?

I suppose you know that the Pope is the Bishop of Rome, and that Rome at the time of our Saviour's birth, was the capital city of the whole world. You know also, that when our blessed Lord left His home at Nazareth, to preach throughout Judea the glad tidings of His kingdom, He called to him, one after another, twelve men, His twelve Apostles, whom He chose out of the world to be the princes and pastors of His Church, in His stead, when He should have ascended up into heaven. One of these, called Simon, He was pleased to mark out for especial honor; first, by giving him the name of Peter, which signifies a rock, telling him at the same time, that on that rock He would build His Church; then, by committing to him the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and lastly, after His resurrection, by thrice solemnly charging him to feed His sheep. From these and other marks of honor conferred by our Lord on St. Peter, the whole Christian Church, from the beginning looked upon him as the Prince of the Apostles. After our Lord's death, St. Peter went to Rome, and became Bishop of that city; and both he, and all the Bishops who have come after him, one after another, without interruption, even to the present day, have always been looked upon by the whole Catholic Church as its visible head upon earth, whom all