

THE CATHOLIC.

QUOD SEMPER, QUOD UBIQUE, QUOD AD OMNIBUS CREDITUM EST.—WHAT ALWAYS, AND EVERY WHERE, AND BY ALL IS BELIEVED.

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THE CATHOLIC

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EDITOR.

A REFUTATION OF THE CHARGE OF RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION URGED AGAINST THE CATHOLIC RELIGION;

Being an abridgement of his fourth letter to a Prebendary; by the Right Rev. John Milner, D.D., F. S. A.
(Continued.)

We now proceed to general councils, on which head a common citation is the third canon of the fourth Lateran council, held in 1215, which excommunicated all heretics, and ordered that they should be delivered up to the secular power to undergo due punishment, and that the latter should be obliged, under pain of ecclesiastical censures, and the loss of their lands, to extirpate all heretics resident upon them. It is true, one of our ancient historians denies that these canons in general were the acts of the council itself;† and that of one of the most learned Protestant divines asserts that the canon above quoted, in particular, is spurious.‡

Without, however, entering into those discussions, it is proper to state, that there is an essential difference, with respect even to general councils, between defining articles of faith, such as those which condemn the impieties of the Albigenses, in the first canon of this council, and ordering exterior points of discipline, such as those in question, are in the third canon. The former are considered as immutable truths, and regard the whole Church. The latter are frequently limited, with respect both to time and to place, and have no force whatever upon individuals, until they are received and published in the several parts of Christendom; by the civil power, in what regards civil matters, and by the ecclesiastical, in what appertains to the Church. Thus many exterior ordinances of discipline, which were decreed in the last General Council of Trent, not having been received in this kingdom, in France and in many other countries, are not therein considered as obligatory by the strictest Catholics. And thus the canon in question, admitting it to be genuine, & to have been received in some places formerly, with respect to the particular case for which it was decreed, has confessedly no force now in any part of the Church, as those can testify who have travelled in Catholic countries.* In the next place, we observe with the continuator of Fleury, that the ordinances of this council with regard to temporal matters, such as the corporal punishment of heretics, the deposition of magistrates and feudatory princes, particularly of the Earl of Toulouse, who was here glanced at, were made with the concurrence of those who had competent authority in these matters. I speak of the different temporal sovereigns of Christendom, most of whom attended this council in person, or by their ambassadors, particularly the emperors of Germany and Constantinople, the kings of England, France, Hungary, Arragon, Sicily, Jerusalem, and Cyprus, with a great number of inferior potentates.† Lastly to speak of the justice of this canon; it is to be

remembered, that in the catalogue of heresies which have prevailed in different ages, there was one of so impious, so perfidious, & so infamous a nature, & above all so destructive of the human species, that a pagan government would have betrayed its duty, which neglected to extirpate it by fire and sword. Such were the heretics against whom those severities, of which Protestants complain, were decreed by a concurrence of the civil and ecclesiastical power, in the fourth Council of Lateran.

The system of which I have been speaking, whatever might be its origin among pagans, was introduced among Christians by Cerdon, Marcion,‡ and other Gnostics, in the age immediately following that of the apostles. The person, however, who reduced it into form, and was chiefly instrumental in propagating it, was the Persian heresiarch, Manes, in the third century. The leading tenet of it was the doctrine of two principles, or deities; one, the author of good spirits, of the New Testament, &c.; the other, of bad spirits, of the flesh; of the old law, and of the Old Testament. Hence by a necessary consequence, flowed the impieties and abominations above alluded to, which all contemporary writers, and the judicial acts still extant, proved to have been held by the Manichæans; their denial of Christ's incarnation, their defiling the volumes of the Bible and the plate of the altar, their avowed system of perjury, their condemning the use of all animal food as impure, and still more the propagation of mankind, as concurring to the work of the evil deity, whilst they let loose the reins to every sensuality which was not productive of that important end. This heresy, like most others, branched out into a great variety of sects, and assumed different names; the current, however, of its leading doctrines is clearly traced, through the countries which it has principally infected, from the infancy of the Church down to a late period in the middle centuries.

It was against these pests of society and human nature, that fires were first lighted in the west, not, however, by a pope, or any other churchman, but by the religious King of France, Robert, in 1022; and it was to repress and root out these, when, confiding in their numbers and the power of their protectors, they proceeded to propagate their opinions by the sword, burning down churches and monasteries, and and perpetrating indiscriminate slaughter on all ages, degrees, and sexes, that the crusade of our Simon de Montfort and the inquisition were set on foot, and the canons passed. Mosheim, speaking of the Albigenses, Turlupins, Beghards, or brethren of the free spirit, as they called themselves, in the 13th century, says: "Certain writers, who have accustomed themselves to entertain a high idea of the sanctity of all those who, in the middle ages, separated themselves from the Church of Rome, suspect the inquisitors of having attributed falsely impious doctrines to the brethren of the free spirit. But this suspicion is entirely groundless, &c.... Their shocking violation of decency, was a consequence of their pernicious system. They looked upon decency and modesty as marks of inward corruption... Certain enthusiasts among them maintained, that the believer could not sin, let his conduct be ever so horrible or atrocious."—*Eccles. Hist.* vol. iii. p. 284, Maclaine's translation. See, also, the *Protestant Centuriators*, and the *Dictionary* of Cooper, Bishop

* See the answer to Abernethy, by Bishop Hay; and Dorrel's case stated, in answer to C. Lesley, &c.
† Fleury, *Hist. Rec. Contin.* l. xvii. § 49.
‡ Tertul. *advers. Marcionem.*

of Winchester, concerning the Albigenses.

From the persecution of the Albigenses, we pass on to those exercised against Wycliff and Huss, by the Council of Constance. As to the former of these it is usual among Protestant writers to extol his courage and vigour of mind, excuse his errors, and condemn the impotent vengeance of the council, in causing his bones to be burnt. A spirit of candour, however, would lead to the discovery of something like toleration in the conduct of those, who, whilst they condemned Wycliff's errors, left his person unpunished and unmolested during the whole of his life, and an impartial view of the dreadful effects of his doctrine in this and other countries, would have disclosed, in the ordinances of the council against his memory and remains, not an act of vengeance, but a wise and salutary instruction to mankind.

Few inflammatory writers have approached to the seditious excesses of Wycliff, where he teaches the people, that if they can discover any mortal sin, that is to say, any signal violation of sobriety, chastity, piety, meekness, or humility, in their rector, bishop, magistrate, or sovereign, they are at liberty to disclaim his authority; and depose him if he be in their power; or have, like him instructed us, that we are not obliged to pay our taxes or our tithes, or to regard any laws or statutes, unless the justice of them can be demonstrated from Scripture;† or have proclaimed the sinfulness of the clergy possessing any temporal property, and tumultuously called upon the people to assist in despoiling them of it.‡ I pass lightly over a great number of other impious and seditious tenets of Wycliff, and his chief disciples, John Ashton, Nicholas Hereford, William Swyngherberry, &c. tending to the destruction of all religion, natural as well as revealed, and to general robbery, massacre, & anarchy; such as that God ought to obey the Devil;§ that all human actions happen by inevitable necessity;|| that literary institutions, such as colleges and universities, are diabolical;¶ that it is unlawful to pray in churches, or to keep holy the Lord's day; ** that if ecclesiastics are guilty of any sin, their temporal princes ought to cut off their heads; and that if the prince himself be guilty of sin, it is the business of the people to punish him ††

* "Nullus est dominus civilis, nullus episcopus, nullus prelati dum est in peccato mortali." *Opiniones et Conclusiones Mag. M. Wycliff, error 7, Knyghton, col. 2648; Walsing. Hist. Ang. p. 283.*

† "Ubi leges humanae non fundantur in Scriptura Sacra evidenti non tenentur obedire."—*Walsing. Ibid.*

‡ "Est contra Scripturam Sacram quod viri ecclesiastici habeant temporales possessiones."—*Knyght. col. 2648. "Nunquam erit bona pax in regno isto, quosque temporalia ista auferantur a viris ecclesiasticis, et ideo rogatur populum, manibus extensis, ut unusquisque adjuvaret in ista materia."—*Walsingham. p. 284.**

§ "Dens debet obedire Diabolo."—*Hæres. Wycliff. Knyght. col. 2648.*

¶ Art. 27, Wycl. Condemn. In Concil. Constan.

** *Ibid.*, art. 29.

†† *Hypodig. Walsing. p. 577.*
‡‡ "Quod si persona ecclesiastica deliquerit, et se non emendaverit, licitum est dominis secularibus, hujusmodi radere per scapulas. Si quisque temporalis deliquerit, licitum est popularibus ipsuin corrigere."—*Knyght. col. 2657.* A learned Protestant doctor, speaking of the laws against these innovators, says, "it was not for their speculative opinions, considered purely as such, that the followers of Wycliff were prosecuted, because, in certain respects, they maintained opinions derogatory to the rights of princes, injurious to society, and contrary to the laws in force." He proceeds to quote Archbishop Parker (*Antiq. Britan.*) in proof that "the laws made against them were necessary, on account of the tumults they occasioned and the terror they were of to civil government."—*Dr. Fiddes's Life of Card. Wolsey, pp. 33, 39.*

† *Mat. Paris, ad dict. an.* † *Collier's Ecc. Hist.* vol. i. p. 424.