

The True Witness.

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MONTREAL, FRIDAY, JULY 31, 1863.

NEWS OF THE WEEK.

Though several European steamers have arrived since our last, there is little of interest from the Old World to report. The answer of the Czar to the Note of the Western Powers, is looked upon as favorable, and as putting an end to the prospects of war. But the question arises—Will the Poles be content with any concessions that the Czar can make, or that the Powers will demand in their behalf? We do not believe that they will. The Poles have an "idea" which cannot, we think, be realised, for it comprises an independent Poland, and not a restricted kingdom of Poland tributary or subservient to Russia. If the Poles really expect to resuscitate the ancient Poland, they have imagined a vain thing, and are doomed to disappointment; the Great Powers of the West could not aid the Poles in such a scheme if they would, and would not even if they could.

The British press is busy with the affairs of the belligerents on this Continent. Mr. Roebuck had consented to withdraw his motion, advocating recognition of the Southern Confederacy; and it is added that the report that Spain was about to recognise the Seceded States is premature. From all that appears on the surface at present, we should imagine that the policy which finds most favor in the Old World is that of non-interference, and of strict neutrality betwixt the belligerents, who are to be allowed to cut one another's throats their own way.

Since our last nothing of any great importance has occurred in the United States. An attack in force by the Yankees upon Fort Wagner had been gallantly repulsed by the Confederates with trifling loss to themselves, but with great slaughter amongst the assailants. Morgan has come to grief, having himself been captured, and his little band having been destroyed and dispersed. General Lee is said to be retreating, and an attack upon him by General Meade is daily expected. Upon the whole, the condition of affairs is not brilliant for the Southern; they are, if not discouraged by recent reverses, very hard pressed, and must be prepared to make many and great sacrifices before they can win their freedom, and establish their national independence.

No attempts have as yet been made to renew the draft in New York. We are told however that it is to be enforced; but it is to be hoped that there is yet enough of manhood amongst the people to render the task difficult, if not impossible of accomplishment. What is wanted is organization under bold and skilful leaders.

In several instances Catholic priests have been drafted; and their congregations have had to contribute out of their scanty means towards the ransom of their pastors. It is customary with a certain class to inveigh against England, and the iniquity of British legislation; but what would be the outcry if in England, Catholic Clergymen were to be seized upon, torn from their altars, and compelled to serve in the ranks as private soldiers! The democratic system of the United States, however, has prepared the way for despotism, and made the people apt for slavery, or else the latter would never patiently submit to the ignoble tyranny beneath which they now groan. As British subjects, accustomed to freedom from our birth, we cannot easily conceive how men of the same national origin as ourselves, inheritors of the same political traditions, and of the same common law, should have fallen so low as have these enslaved Yankees; but we would do well to bear in mind that their present abject condition is but the logical consequence of their democratic past.—Liberty in the true sense of the word, personal liberty, that liberty which alone is worth fighting for, is incompatible with pure democratic institutions, and of all despotisms, the most degrading, as it is the most cruel, is the tyranny of a brute majority. With the example of the Northern States before our eyes, how thankful should not we be, in that our lot is that of free British subjects; how careful should we be to guard our Constitution, and our institutions, against the inroads of democracy and the demon of centralisation.

Mexico, it appears, is to be raised from the slough of a republic in which it has so long been wallowing, to the dignity of an empire—so at

least will the present arbiter of its fortunes, Louis Napoleon. Maximilian of Austria is designated as the future Emperor, but it is by no means certain that he will accept the proffered crown, in which case, we suppose, a member of the Napoleonic family will be selected to bear rule over the newly-created Empire. We wait with no little curiosity to see the effects upon the Yankees of this trampling under foot of what they call the "Munroe doctrine." It cannot be expected that they will approve of it, or that they will allow it to pass without a remonstrance; but the friends of liberty and order on this Continent have good reasons to congratulate themselves on the success of French arms in Mexico, and to pray that they may be the means of opposing a barrier to the further progress of Yankee principles.

Satan can reprove sin with the dignity of an angel of light; so too the Montreal Witness can denounce, when it suits its turn, the fundamental principles of Protestantism, i.e., the right of "private interpretation" of the Scriptures.—For a suitable text we recommend the subjoined to the serious meditation of our contemporary:

"Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye."—St. Matt. vii. 2.

The occasion that has called forth the attack upon private interpretation of the Scriptures, from the Montreal Witness was furnished by a lecture lately delivered at Toronto by a Protestant minister—sect unknown—of the name of Baxter, and reported at length in the *Globe*.—This Mr. Baxter is a follower in the footsteps of the notorious "Great Tribulation Cumming."—He undertakes to expound the prophecies with reference to passing events; and he is very certain, indeed he has not the slightest doubt upon the subject—that "we were now under the sixth vial which is poured upon the river Euphrates, drying up its waters, evidently symbolizing the decay of the Turkish nation;" that "we cannot be far from the seventh vial;" that Louis Napoleon is the Mystical Beast, Anti-Christ, the number 666 being evidently contained in the letters of his name; that he, the French Emperor, is about to establish a universal monarchy, to restore the Jews, to set up a new religion of which he, not Christ, will be the object, and that in about three or four years he will be defeated at the battle of Armageddon by Christ in person. After this the reign of the millennium will commence. Cotton will be as abundant and as cheap as ever; free trade will flourish, sound Protestant principles will obtain, the Pope, that man of sin, and that son of perdition, will be cast into the fiery pit, and the reign of Baxter and the other saints upon earth, including of course the editor of the Montreal Witness, will immediately commence. Of all these things Mr. Baxter is as sure as are the Ministry of a majority in the approaching Session of Parliament.

Now in all this rigmarole there is nothing more absurd or blasphemous than is to be found in the ordinary run of Protestant commentaries upon, or expositions of, the Scriptures; nothing for which there is not as good a warrant as there is for the ludicrous applications that Protestants ordinarily make of the prophecies of the Apocalypse to the Pope and the Catholic Church.—That the Sovereign Pontiff is the *Scarlet Lady* is with many of our evangelical friends a fixed faith which fire would not melt out of them; why then should the Witness be so severe upon Mr. Baxter for his application of the prophecies concerning the *Beast* to Louis Napoleon, as well as to Pius IX? Yet so it is; and the Witness who argues so warmly in favor of the right of private judgment, and the private interpretation of Scripture, against Popery, can on a sudden change his tone, and argue as warmly against the fundamental principles of the Holy Protestant Faith. "The Scripture is so wrested" forcibly complains our contemporary, "that its original meaning is not only lost, but turned into a channel wholly foreign to its purpose. It hardly need be said, it is by such means as these that Mormons and Millerites, and other deluded fanatics—(the Witness might here have said and all other Protestant sects)—can make the Scriptures seem to support their notions."

This is very true; this is but a reiteration of the old Popish complaint that, in the hands of Protestants, the Bible becomes but a nose of wax, which every man moulds into the form which best pleases him. But though strictly true, it is a complaint which comes with but bad grace from a Protestant. What right, we should like to know, has the writer in the *Witness* to criticise or to sit in judgment upon, the interpretation which his brother Protestant puts upon the Scriptures? or why should he condemn in Mormons and Millerites and Baxterites that which he, and all his brother sectaries practise themselves, and claim as their natural and inalienable right, as rational beings? It is true no doubt that the Bible is most strangely wrested by all Protestant sects—so that its original meaning is entirely lost, and must remain for ever hidden unless there be vouchsafed to us some infallible, because divinely illuminated, interpreter of its mysterious contents; but this is

an argument not against this sect, or that sect in particular, but against all Protestantism. It applies as forcibly to Calvinists as it does to Mormons, to the disciples of Wesley as to those of Miller; and in availing himself of it our injudicious and most inconsistent contemporary furnishes a nicely pickled rod for his own heretical back.

"Nothing," our contemporary also most truly adds, "has a greater tendency to bring the Scriptures into contempt, than this turning and warping texts from their original intention, and dragging obscure passages into prominence in order to support some fanciful theory." But this is precisely what all Protestant sects do, and have done from the beginning; but this is precisely what the teachers of the French Canadian Missionary Societies are still doing with the object of perverting little Romish children. One man, being a believer in Spiritualism and Table Turning, finds warrant for his faith in the New Testament, and gravely assures us that Christ Himself taught the importance of Spirit rapping, the duty of paying heed to the "knockings," and that He Himself was a powerful medium. Is it not written: "knock and it shall be opened to you?" does not our Lord Himself represent Himself as standing at the door and "knocking?" Nothing therefore can be clearer from Scripture, and from the words of Christ, that He His disciples are bound to give heed to the "knockings," and to be ever on the watch for the "rappings," and other manifestations of a spiritual presence. Thus argues the Spiritualist; quoting the Bible, and with as good show of reason and truth on his side, as has the Calvinist or the Methodist when the latter pretends to find in the Bible proof that the Roman Catholic Church is the "woman drunken with the blood of the Saints and with the blood of the Martyrs of Jesus"—with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and who has made all the inhabitants drunk with the wine of her fornication.

Now Protestants of the *Witness* complexion can perceive the mingled absurdity and blasphemy of that Spiritualistic interpretation of Scripture, which represents Christ as a Spirit-Knocker, and as a Medium, because He held converse with the spirit of the long defunct Moses, contrary to the express injunction of the Jewish law-giver who prohibited necromancy, or "seeking the spirits of the dead." But with strange or rather ludicrous inconsistency they are insensible to the equally gross absurdities and blasphemies of which they themselves are guilty when they wrest the Scriptures into harmony with their own narrow views. They can still spy out the mote that is in their brother's eye, whilst the beam that is in their own eye they do not consider.

This is, to all who will rightly consider it, one of the marvels of Protestantism, a signal proof of the strong delusion to which its votaries have been given over. We can understand and appreciate the position of the Catholic, who holding that no utterance of the Holy Ghost is of private interpretation, and that the Church alone is competent to declare, not only of what writings Scripture *par excellence* is composed, but what the meaning thereof, submits his reason in all things belonging to the supernatural order, to her whom he accepts as a divinely assisted teacher. This position, we say, is intelligible and indeed eminently rational; but we cannot understand that of him who, repudiating the theory that God has given to man a living, ever present and infallible expounder of His written word, asserts the right of private judgment, and the competence of human reason; and yet when this right is exercised by a brother Protestant presumes to take him to task for irreverence and wresting the Scriptures; but we can conceive nothing more absurd because more inconsistent, than the religious status of him who tells us in one breath that the Bible records are so clear and simple as to be intelligible to the meanest understanding—so that even the wayfaring man though a fool shall not err therein; and in the next roundly rates the learned ministers of Protestantism, the doctors or teachers of the heretical Israel, for that in their interpretations of Scripture, they presume to differ from that which he in the exercise of his private judgment has seen fit to adopt.

* "History of the Supernatural."—By W. Howitt.

SECONDARY PUNISHMENTS.—A philanthropist—in the modern sense of the word, is one who has a very tender regard for himself, and at the same time a great respect for the decencies. He is generally a most respectable person: fond of his ease, and averse therefore to sounds or sights which disturb his tranquillity, which shock his ears or his eyes. By a very simple process, he persuades, first himself, and then others, that this his tender regard for himself is tenderness for his brother; and that his incorrigible selfishness is but the highest development of Christian charity. A philanthropist would not, it is true—like one of those superstitious Monks of old, or your modern Sister of Charity—take a sick man into his house, wash his wounds, and dress his putrid ulcers. No! this he would not do,

because his eyes, his sense of smell are so delicate that the mere approach of Lazarus overpowers him. But then he would build a splendid poor house, with substantial stone walls, and the strongest of iron-barred windows, in which he would shut Lazarus up; without the remotest inkling that he was not in all respects a greater benefactor of the human race than Christ Himself.

As he deals with the sick and the poor, so does the modern philanthropist deal with the criminal. He buries his dead out of sight in a Penitentiary; puts a most respectable coat of white wash over the fetid sepulchre; and proudly contrasts his mode of dealing with felons, with that of his ancestors who used to inflict upon them such cruel scourgings, and other corporal punishments. Perhaps—were we to examine the matter a little more closely—we should find that the secondary punishments of a former age were far less cruel than are those of the present; whilst it is certain that, as deterrents from crime, they were infinitely more efficacious.

Not that we would approve, in every respect, of the ancient mode of dealing with the criminal. But it is, we think certain, that in their treatment of him, our ancestors had got hold of a true principle—though it is true that they sometimes mis-applied and abused that principle. And, paradoxical as it may sound, we assert that their scourgings, pilloryings, brandings, and other exemplary punishments—even their mutilations—were less cruel, less immoral, more efficacious as deterrents from crime, and in every respect better as a system of secondary punishments, than the system of long-protracted imprisonments to which we actually resort. Better, if viewed from the stand point of political-economy, because less costly to the community, and because exciting no undue competition in the labor-market: better if viewed from the stand point of Christianity, because in reality less immoral, less cruel, because far more equitable in their operation; and above all—because infinitely better calculated to repress crime, and to give protection to the honest and industrious members of society.

That it is cheaper to flog, or pillory, or brand a thief, than to imprison him for years in a Penitentiary, no one we think will venture to deny; or that it is less burdensome to the community to inflict on him some short smart, exemplary but severe corporal chastisement, which he will remember to his dying day. Besides most men have incumbrances in the shape of a wife, or children dependent upon them for support. When therefore you imprison a head of a family; when for years you lock the bread-winner up in a penitentiary, you impose upon the community the burden of providing for the keep, not only of the felon whom you have locked up, and whom you are fattening at the public expense, in your prison-house—but of his wife and children whom you have reduced to beggary. Judged from the stand point of the political economist, nothing can be more ridiculous, more costly to the community, and in every way injurious to society, than the existing system of long-protracted, non-exemplary, imprisonment now in vogue. That system answers no one conceivable good purpose, and effectually accomplishes all evil purposes. Destitute of one advantage, it combines every possible or indeed conceivable disadvantage.

Judged from the stand point of Christianity, however, the evils of the actually existing system stand out in still stronger, and far more hideous relief. Nothing can be more abominable, more essentially immoral than the long protracted imprisonments, with their inevitable concomitant—the total separation of the sexes—which, in obedience to the crude theories of a maudlin philanthropy, society now inflicts upon men and women, in the flower of their age, and the heat of their passions. To talk of moral reformation as possible under such circumstances is to talk unmitigated cant. The prisoner who enters upon a term of long protracted imprisonment—no matter how morally depraved he or she entered his or her cell—invariably leaves it worse, infinitely worse at heart. Prison discipline, the necessity of complying with certain rules and regulations, the impossibility of obtaining liquor—and thus of gratifying the corrupt passions in one particular direction—all these things, no doubt will have had their effect in generating a certain external decency of behaviour, and a subdued demeanor in the presence of strangers, the prison officers, and above all, of the prison chaplains—if the latter have, or are supposed to have, any influence with the authorities towards procuring for a contrite penitent, and truly reformed convict, a slight mitigation of pains and penalties. This—and this much—but no more, can any system of prison or Penitentiary discipline effect towards the moral reformation of the convict. It may make clean the outside of the cup or platter, but it leaves the inside foul as ever. The subject is a delicate one. We dare not raise even in part, the veil that conceals from the eyes of "respectable philanthropy" the unmentionable horrors of the prison-house. There are things which must not be mentioned to ears polite; and there are amongst these things several which find no place

in Official Reports, of which Inspectors take no cognisance, and wherewith Red Tape is incompetent to deal. They exist nevertheless, as we know—as every man who has studied the question, well knows—no matter what "*Blue Books*" may say to the contrary. They exist here, at our very doors: there always, and every where, where men are shut up for years by themselves, as they are shut up in our gaols and Penitentiaries. Better, we repeat it, more merciful, in a moral point of view, because not so certainly fatal to his moral welfare, is the sentence which sends the convict to the gallows—thac that which consigns him for years to the living tomb of the Penitentiary. That this can for a moment be doubted surprises us. If there be one argument against the morality of Catholicity which, more than another, Protestants are in the habit of urging, and appealing to as conclusive, unanswerable—it is the argument based upon the enforced celibacy of the Catholic clergy—and upon the impossibility of Monks and Nuns being faithful to their vows. And yet the men who use this infamous argument, assume as a matter of course, that the enforced celibacy so necessarily injurious to the Catholic religious according to them, is perfectly innocuous in the case of the convict; in whom, as phrenologists and physiologists well know, the animal always preponderates over the spiritual. Can there be inconsistency greater than this?

Tested by the moral standard which Christianity has established, the actual system of secondary punishments, is indefensible. We question the right of the State to separate man and wife, as under that system it separates them. We deny that the interest of society require that separation: we more than doubt, if the law of God, really tolerates it. Look at the cruel and unnatural position in which society places the wife of the convict, doomed to long years of imprisonment in the Penitentiary. She has all the disadvantages at once of wife, and of widow. She is a wife, in that she cannot marry, in that she has no chance of finding a husband to help her to earn her bread: yet she is to all intents and purposes a widow—in that to her, her husband is as one dead. Some Protestants would propose to do away with this hideous anomaly by making civil death carry with it all the consequences of natural death, and giving divorce *a vinculo* to the wife of the convict. But this solution of the difficulty cannot be accepted by the Catholic, who recognises in natural death alone, the rupture of the matrimonial chain. How then shall we get rid of the present anomaly, if we uphold the propriety of long protracted imprisonment? How reconcile the legal separation of man and wife, during the life of one of the parties sometimes—with the divine law "whom God hath joined, let not man put asunder?"

Viewed in this light, and from this stand point, the system of perpetual, or even long protracted imprisonment, as a secondary punishment is open to the strongest objections. The moral wrong or cruelty, to the wife thereby deprived of her husband, forcibly separated from him to whom by God's law she is bound to cleave in health and in sickness, in weal and in woe, until death do them part, seems to us indefensible. To the convict thus shut up, thus by law sentenced to a life of celibacy, the moral wrong, or moral injury is still greater; and we see not how Protestants, who constantly predicate of the enforced system of celibacy of the Catholic religious, so many and great abominations, can presume to open their lips in defence of the enforced system of celibacy which our penal system imposes on so numerous a class of the community: and at the same time upon that class of the community to which, from its want of previous moral training, enforced celibacy must be the most dangerous, and morally destructive. That God in His long-suffering has not rained down fire from heaven on our "Penitentiaries," and "Model Prisons," as of old He rained fire and brimstone on the Cities of the Plain, is no reason why man should continue to uphold those abominations—which moreover are obnoxious for many other reasons besides those that we have above specified.

In our last issue our readers will have read an admirable speech delivered on the 26th ult., in the House of Commons, by Mr. B. Osborne, on the subject of the Protestant Establishment in Ireland. The subject indeed is so old, the grievance and iniquity so monstrous and palpable, that it was difficult for him to say anything very novel or very brilliant thereupon. But the readers cannot but have admired the force and the humor with which Mr. Osborne returned to the charge. It is because the Irish Establishment is such a palpable or self-evident iniquity that it is one so difficult to denounce appropriately. One might as well attempt to paint the lily, or gild the rose, as endeavor to add one darker shade to that which is the work of the Prince of Darkness himself.

If the supporters of this Establishment find it a hard, indeed an impossible task to defend it, or to palliate its existence, its opponents find it nearly equally difficult to suggest a remedy.—Mr. Osborne's motion in so far as it assumed a