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TRACTS FOR THE MILLION.

THE CHURCH THE WITNESS OF SCRIPTURE; OR HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT THE BIBLE IS?

(Concluded.)

A written document of any importance requires, in the ordinary transactions of life, the attestation of witnesses, and so also does Holy Scripture, which is, after all, but a written document. And this fact of its inspiration, being a fact at once so very important, and so altogether belonging to a supernatural order of things, requires a witness of a peculiar kind of authority. Indeed, our belief in the inspiration of Scripture, to be thoroughly and satisfactorily established, should rest on the testimony of an inspired witness, that witness again proving by miracles that such divine commission to teach and testify had been really given him. And just such witnesses we have in the Apostles of our Lord. We know that, in the old dispensation, inspired and wonder-working Prophets arose from time to time; and we are told by a Jewish historian, that by them was attested the inspiration of the sacred books of the Old Testament. This received a further seal from the testimony of the Apostles, and to the inspiration of the New Testament they are the sole witnesses. But how do we know that they bore such testimony? How do we know any thing about them? We were none of us living in their time, nor our fathers, nor our fathers' fathers, for many generations back. Who, then, is there, yet living among men, who heard them speak, and can bear witness to what they said? There is one such witness, and one only—the Catholic Church. She exists in our day, she existed in the days of our fathers, she existed in the days of the Apostles; and throughout she has retained, and still retains her identity—though ages have passed away, and successive generations of her children have sprung into being, lived, and disappeared, like the leaves of the forest.

It is on her testimony that we ground our belief in the inspiration of Scripture; and that too with unhesitating certainty, because we look upon her not as a mere human witness, nor as the mouthpiece of a human tradition, but as a witness who can neither deceive nor be deceived: a witness, not inspired indeed as were the Apostles, for she has not, like them, a new revelation to promulgate, but infallible, that is, divinely guarded from all possibility of error, in whatever regards faith or morals; such she claims to be, and we believe her claim, because her very existence through so many centuries, and under so much opposition—her Catholicity, her unity, her changelessness from age to age, where every thing is changing around her, the supernatural holiness of so many of her children, and her abiding gift of miracles, are to us sufficient grounds of belief. Protestants admit none of these; yet in this most important point, (to them *all-important*;) the inspiration of Scripture, they trust her testimony as unhesitatingly as we do ourselves.

Again, another point on which (at least as far as the New Testament is concerned) they receive her decision without question is, that of what is called the Canon of Scripture, that is, what books are to be accounted as really inspired, and what not. Protestants generally have a kind of superstitious notion about the Bible, as if it were something essentially one and indivisible, and as if to doubt the genuineness or inspiration of a single line were to doubt that of the whole. This last belief is true now, because all contained in the Bible has now received the seal of the Church's testimony; and therefore *now* to doubt any, would be to doubt the authority which stamps authenticity on all. But it was far otherwise at the beginning. There are two facts which ought to be known to Protestants, that they may better understand the value of the Church's testimony in this matter; in the first place, that there were very many writings, believed by many to be inspired, current among the Christians of the first ages, which the Church has since rejected, in which rejection Protestants have acquiesced so entirely, as in all probability to be ignorant of the very name and pretensions of these writings; and, in the second place, that of the books which they now believe to be the Scripture so unhesitatingly, that to question them would seem like blasphemy, several were long doubted about in early times, though at last received by the Church as genuine Scripture. There were no less than twenty-one gospels current among the faithful; there was an epistle of St. Barnabas, which exists at the present day; there was also an epistle of St. Clement, Bishop of Rome, the third in succession from St. Peter, but also a contemporary of his, (Philip iv. 3.) for the sword of the persecutor made succession very rapid in those days; this too has come down to us; and a work, called the "Shepherd," by St. Hermas, who was also one of St. Paul's friends, (Rom. xii. 14.) These

were used to be read in many churches in early times; but afterwards, on careful inquiry and investigation, were rejected by the Church, from the canon of inspired Scripture. On the other hand, St. Paul's epistle to the Hebrews, the two epistles of St. Peter, the epistle of St. James, that of St. Jude, the two last of St. John, and the book of the Apocalypse, also single chapters, or portions of chapters, in three out of the four Gospels, were long much doubted about and questioned, though at last received. And all this was done, the one were received and the others rejected, only by an authoritative decision of the Church; that is, by the decision of councils, as they are called, or assemblies of Bishops, who, on examining the subject, used indeed all the means which the most enlightened human wisdom could suggest as likely to bring them to a right conclusion, yet at the same time mainly relied on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, whom Christ Himself had promised should lead them into all truth. And this decision, so made has never since been questioned, as far at least as the New Testament is concerned, but is adhered to by Protestants quite as unhesitatingly as by Catholics.

With respect to the Old Testament Scriptures, there are certain books which have been decided by the Church in the same way to be inspired Scripture, and which were accordingly received as such for more than twelve centuries by all Christians, without exception, but which Protestants now reject on the authority of the Jews, who do not admit the said books to be inspired. Their history is briefly this: The Old Testament books were for the first time collected and gathered together into a volume, as is generally believed, by Esdras or Ezra, who lived at the time of the Babylonian captivity. These writings, as we know, had been composed at long intervals of time, and their inspiration attested by a succession of inspired, and, for the most part, wonder-working prophets. But after the time of Esdras, other books were written, and others again discovered which had been written before; all these are what Protestants call the Apocryphal Books; and at the time of our Lord's coming upon earth, the Jews were divided in opinion as to the fact of their inspiration, there never having been any authoritative decision of the whole Jewish Church upon the subject. Josephus the Jewish historian, gives as a reason for not accounting them inspired, that since the Babylonian captivity there had been no certain succession of prophets to attest them. But our blessed Lord is to us a prophet, and more than a prophet; He must have known whether or not these books were inspired, and He is not likely to have withheld such knowledge from His Apostles, nor they, again, from their disciples; and therefore, when, after much question and discussion, and careful sifting of the belief of the apostolical churches, the collective voice of the Church decided that they were to be received as Scripture, one does not see why even Protestants, receiving as they do, without question or hesitation, the whole of the New Testament solely on this very same testimony of the Catholic Church, should yet totally and contemptuously reject that testimony as regards the Old Testament, preferring to it the authority of those Jews who are the descendants of the crucifiers of our Lord, and who, having rejected Him, are themselves rejected of God, and no longer His chosen people, nor under the guidance of His Spirit. The Church of England in her 6th article declares, that "by Holy Scripture we do understand those canonical books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority there never was any doubt in the Church;" but, as we have seen, if she really carried out this principle, she would reject the epistle to the Hebrews, the two epistles of St. Peter, the epistles of St. James and St. Jude, the two last of St. John, and the Book of the Apocalypse, which she nevertheless receives without hesitation as inspired Scripture.

But the wonder, after all, is rather that Protestants accept these books than that they reject the others; for why, believing of the Church, as they do, they accept her testimony at all on a matter so all-important, it is hard to say. And, in truth, this inconsistency of admitting the authority of the Church on this point, and rejecting it on every other, is keenly felt by Protestants in other countries, more especially in Germany, where the people are more given to reasoning than we are; and they accordingly reject it here also, and set themselves to the examination of Scripture as freely and fearlessly as they would to that of any other books, till they have ended, too many of them at least, in doubting the genuineness of one portion, criticising the history, or chronology, or morality of another, and totally disbelieving the inspiration of the whole. Some bold and active minds in this country are unhappily following their example—most unhappily, but as Protestants, certainly not unreasonably; the unreasonableness is rather with those who act otherwise. The truth is, that Protest-

antism, as it ordinarily exists in this country, is a mere tissue of inconsistencies, and holds a position that cannot be explained by any rules of common sense. Why, believing no more, it believes so much; or why believing so much, it believes no more, is a complete puzzle. Protestantism in England is like a great tree torn up by the roots from the rock out of which it grew, and leaning head foremost over a chasm, yet stayed in its fall either by some of its fibres still clinging to the soil, or by some other interposing force; while Protestantism in most other countries, more especially in Germany, is like the same tree fallen utterly and lying prostrate in the abyss; or in other words, Protestantism elsewhere is, for the most part, simple unbelief; here, by a happy inconsistency, it retains a disjointed and fragmentary Christianity. But this cannot long continue: the tree may tremble for a while over the chasm, but the first storm will hurl it down. Minds are now fast awakening to reason, and inquire concerning religion; and when this is the case, an inconsistent system cannot long endure; and this very belief in Scripture, which, as we have said, has been long thrown aside, at least among the more intellectual in Protestant Germany, will it is to be feared, not long abide in Protestant England; for in truth it has no reasonable basis except trust in the testimony of the Church; and it is not reasonable to trust that testimony with such implicit faith in this one particular, and on every other to reject it with scorn and hatred, as though it were the very voice of the deceiver.

Better, however, by far is inconsistent belief than consistent unbelief; and this very inconsistency of our Protestant countrymen may be traced to their instinctive conviction of a great truth, which, if brought to light and consciously recognised, might go far towards leading them back to the Church. It is this, that if Christianity be true, there must be somewhere an infallible teacher to explain to us what it is; and for this reason: Christianity demands belief as a condition of our eternal salvation, which could not be if there were no means of ascertaining what it is that we are expected to believe. Protestants have thrown aside the Church, which, for fifteen centuries, had been acknowledged as that infallible teacher; but still they have not thrown aside the deep inward conviction that such a teacher there must be; and as there is no body of men, no living authority, except the one they have rejected, which has any imaginable claim to be such, they naturally enough seize on the written word without inquiring very carefully whether from its structure it appears to have been intended by God to stand in the stead of a living teacher, whether from the result it appears that it actually does teach with certainty, or, which alone is to our present purpose, what reasons they have for believing in its inspiration. In fact, the real ground on which they receive it is this: an infallible teacher there must be somewhere; and if this be not such there is none; this last assertion being a begging of the very question at issue between them and the Catholic Church. All we would urge upon them, at present is, to hold fast this belief in the inspiration of Scripture; but at the same time to remember on whose sole testimony it is that they have real solid ground for that belief; and therefore to ask themselves whether, as in this she gives what they all feel and know to be true testimony, they ought not in candor to give her a patient hearing when she goes on to explain what is the true office of this Holy Scripture for whose inspiration she vouches, and her own with regard to it; and also, what is the true meaning of those sacred oracles to which Protestants themselves, if they be at all earnest-minded, must feel they need some key, as no two sects, scarcely any two individuals, understand them alike. This last subject, however, must be entered into more fully on another occasion, when we shall consider the Church as the Interpreter of Scripture.

THE CATHOLIC FRIEND SOCIETY.

(From the Boston Pilot.)

The introductory lecture was given by Mr. Brownson. Why do Protestants persecute Catholics? In every country where Protestantism was introduced, it was introduced by intolerance; by appeals to the secular power. It was so introduced into Great Britain. Whips, scaffolds, and prisons were the means employed. It was so introduced into Sweden and Norway. Protestantism would never have taken root in Germany, if the princes had not drawn the sword to force it on the people. They were grateful to reformers who allowed them to have two wives at once. And Protestantism persecutes now, appeals now to the secular arm as much as it ever did. The secular power upholds what little is left of it in Prussia and the German Protestant States, in England, as witness the Penal Bill, in Ireland, as witness the great emigration. Sweden and

other northern countries make it an offence to be converted to the Catholic Church. And in this country, the same thing is evident. In colonial times, most of the States upheld Protestantism, and persecuted Catholics by statutes made to that express end. Priests have been murdered in America for being Catholic Priests. Even now, Protestantism is as persecuting as ever. The anti-papery lecturers and writers, who make it their especial business to show what Protestantism is, are continually endeavoring to stir up popular feeling against Catholics, and so induce government to re-enact laws against them. A large proportion of Americans, all of them who are sincere Protestants, are very willing to persecute Catholics, or to have them persecuted. They will not allow Catholics to hold office, if they can help it. They take care to show their feelings by their treatment of defenceless Catholics who happen to be soldiers, paupers or criminals. New Hampshire still enforces a penal law against Catholics. Maryland has still a statute forbidding Catholics to approach within a certain distance of the State House.

The fact, then, that Protestants persecuted Catholics always and everywhere is sufficiently demonstrated. Why do they persecute?

It is not because they think there is no salvation in the Catholic Church. Few, if any, Protestants, say that Catholics cannot be saved. The most they claim, on this score, for Protestantism is, that it is easier to go to heaven in their way. No need of fasting, and mortification, of sacramental confession, or of those things commanded by Christ, which are painful to the flesh.

It is not because they think that the Church is a false Church. Protestants who care nothing for religious forms are not seldom the most violent persecutors. England can fairly be taken as a favorable example of a Protestant country. But England actually supports Mahometanism and Heathenism in Asia. And public functionaries are expressly commanded to do nothing which may unnecessarily shock the prejudices of Pagans and Mahometans.

It is not because they think that Catholics are not loyal, peaceable citizens. Their religion teaches them to be loyal. And their conduct under persecution proves that they are loyal, even to persecuting government. Indeed, it is a serious complaint against them that they are now too loyal in England and America.

It is not because they think that Catholics cannot be true republicans. The history of Catholic republics, and of Catholics in America, where Catholics are accused by Protestants, of being servilely true to the government, prove enough on this head.

It is because Catholics owe spiritual allegiance to the Pope, because this very allegiance is the salvation of legitimate governments, inasmuch as it keeps Catholics loyal to the temporal magistrate, while Protestants around them are engaged in an unjust rebellion, or in schemes for disunion. And the only temporal magistrates who ever complained of this allegiance were downright tyrants who saw their subjects protected by the strong arm of Rome.

There are two cities: the City of God and the City of the World. One represents the spirit warring against the flesh; the other represents the flesh lust against the spirit. One is the stronghold of the Church, the other is the stronghold of Protestantism, which, when it is stripped of its disguise, is Atheism, or Carnal Judaism. The flesh *must* lust against the spirit; it is its nature to do so. Every man has to himself a living proof of the fact. So Protestantism *must* lust against the Church, it is its nature to do so. Catholicity, the religion of the Spirit, teaches, in the religious order, the Unity, Universality, Apostolicity, and submission to the voice of God, speaking through the Church; in the political order that both governments and peoples have both rights and duties; that rulers are bound to govern in righteousness and in justice, and that the people are bound to be loyal citizens; in the civil order, that all men are equal, children of one Father, made of the same specific substance, and heirs of the same glory; in the economical order, that commercial theft is as criminal as any other theft; in the social order, that the poor are blessed, and the rich in peril, unless they regard themselves as stewards of the poor; and in the literary, scientific and artistic order, that literature, science and the arts are strictly amenable to the rules of moral theology, and totally subservient to it. In a word, the Church teaches that this world is a means to an end, which is God.

Protestantism, the religion of the flesh, upholds, in the religious order, Variety, Nationality, and Novelty; in the political order, that government has no rights, and that a faction may, without crime, upset the government, that the people have no duties to government; in the civil order, that the distinctions of race are essential, and therefore man, a fighting animal naturally, that men had not a common origin, and,