



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. II.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 1851.

NO. 15.

TRACTS FOR THE MILLION.

THE CHURCH THE GUARDIAN OF SCRIPTURE; OR HOW DOES THE BIBLE COME TO US?

It is told of King Charles II. of merry memory, that he once proposed as a question to a grave scientific society, then just established under his royal patronage, how the fact was to be explained, that if a large fish were thrown into a tub quite full of water, the water would nevertheless not overflow the brim. Many and learned dissertations were written on the subject by different members of the society, and many were the theories which they devised to account for the extraordinary fact; until at last it occurred to some one among them to inquire whether it really was a fact; accordingly the experiment was tried, and the learned body standing round were made certain, by the undeniable evidence of a good splash, that it was no fact at all.

Now it happens unfortunately that people are very much in the habit of acting in the same way as the grave society in question; that is, to take something for granted as a fact, and then reason upon it as such; and, more unfortunately still, they are not always so ready as these were to submit the said fact to the test of experiment; and this, too, in matters of far greater practical importance than the one propounded by King Charles.

Thus Protestants in general are in the habit of saying, without scruple or hesitation, that the Catholic Church is the enemy of God; and give us their reason for pronouncing upon her so harsh a sentence that she is the enemy of God's Word. "She hates the holy Scriptures," they say, "and therefore she must of necessity hate Him who is the author of them;" and having said this, they think they have so thoroughly made their point good as to defy contradiction. And so far they are right, that if their first assertion be true, their second follows as a matter of course; if we know of any that hate God's Word, we cannot be far wrong in concluding that they also hate God. The only question, therefore, in this case is as to the matter of fact: Is the fact so? Is the Catholic Church really the enemy of holy Scripture? And Protestants ought, in justice to us and to themselves, to look into the matter right well, and be very sure that their charge is a true one; otherwise they fall under the condemnation of those who bear false witness against their neighbor.

But, alas, they not only take this fact for granted, but also another, by which they explain and account for this. "The Catholic Church," they go on to say, "well knows that her own teaching and practices are altogether contradicted by holy Scripture, and therefore she hates it as bearing witness against herself."

Now, if this awful charge be true, what line of conduct with respect to holy Scripture may naturally be looked for at the hands of the Catholic Church? Surely, nothing else but that she should pursue it unrelentingly, and use her utmost efforts to blot out every trace of it from the earth. If you had by fraud taken possession of an estate, and the very title-deeds proving it to belong to another had fallen into your hands, would it be long (supposing you wicked enough to persist in your fraud) before you flung them to the flames? Let us examine this matter, then, well, and try to inform ourselves how the Catholic Church has, in point of fact, dealt with the holy Scriptures.

That she has not destroyed them is certain, since you have them safe in your own possession. How did you come by them? You will say that they are part of your very birthright; that a Bible of your own, the gift perhaps of a godfather or godmother, was one of the first treasures of your childhood; and that even before you were old enough to have one of your own, you were already familiar with the sight of it on your mother's book shelves, then how did your mother come by it?—and her parents, and their fathers' fathers? "This brings us back," you will say, "to the glorious Reformers, who translated it into English." Well, but how could the glorious Reformers lay hold of it? It must have been forthcoming in some language or other in their time, or they could not have translated it. We must go back one step further; and this lands us on the undisputed territory of the Catholic Church. Until the days of the Reformers, that is, for more than fifteen hundred years from her beginning, she must have had the Scriptures entirely in her own power; why did she not then destroy them?

Perhaps you will say that to destroy them would be a thing impossible; for they are so widely spread abroad, even to the ends of the earth, that if rooted out of one kingdom, they would still flourish and propagate themselves in another; and even the power

of the Church, pervading all nations, as it did, could scarcely contend against the almost infinite number of copies into which the sacred volume has been multiplied. This is most true of the present day; but there is one thing to be remembered, which makes a difference—vast almost beyond calculation—between the condition of the world now as to books, and that of earlier ages. I mean the art of printing, which was not discovered until more than fourteen hundred years after our Lord's birth. A little thought will bring before our minds, at least in some measure, the greatness of the change which that discovery must have brought about; and we ought to think upon it, if only that we may bless God for having bestowed so rich a gift on these latter days.

We are so used now to get books easily, and at small cost, that we can hardly fancy how far otherwise it was with our forefathers. But only let us consider for a moment what a simple, rapid process printing is, and how much it accomplishes. A number of letters called types set in a frame, then wetted with a particular kind of ink, and one sheet of paper after another pressed down upon them by machinery, with the quickness of thought, and each in turn receiving the impression of the letters,—such are the simple means by which copies of a book may be multiplied to any extent with but little increase of trouble; when the types are once set, to strike off a thousand copies, or ten thousand, is a work easily and rapidly performed. Only compare this with the slow and toilsome process of writing out, which was the only means known to man of multiplying copies of books before this great discovery of printing was made. Think, too, of the length of the Bible, of the time and labor which it would require to transcribe it, and therefore of the cost of such an undertaking; and you will see at once that Bibles must necessarily have been very scarce in those days, compared to what they are now; so scarce that the rulers of the Church might surely have succeeded in destroying them, if their minds had been set upon it; more especially if the ages in question were really so dull and ignorant as the name usually given to them of "the dark ages" would lead people to suppose.

If, then, having it in her power to destroy the Scriptures, the Church did not destroy them, it is but fair to conclude that she did not desire to do so. But such an admission, which every honest inquirer must needs make, is far, very far short of the truth. Not only did she not destroy them, but it was she who first gathered them up into their present form; she kept them safe through Pagan persecutions at the expense of her own blood; she preserved them through ages of ignorance and violence; and afterwards multiplied copies of them, adorning them with all that art and wealth could furnish, and making them the centre of her whole circle of sacred learning; in a word, the Church has been in every age the Guardian of the Bible.

It may sound strange, and to some perhaps even profane, to speak as if the Bible needed any guardian; but you must remember that, after all, the Bible is but a book; and a book can no more have preserved itself than it can have written itself. Of course, Almighty God, if He had so willed, might both have written it and preserved it without using human instruments at all; but we know that, in point of fact, He has not done so. It has been His will that the Bible should be both written and preserved by men; written by men inspired of God for that purpose, and preserved by the Catholic Church; and this last point it is which I wish to set before you at present.

First, then, it was the Church which collected the scattered parts of Scripture, or at least of the New Testament Scriptures, with which we are here more immediately concerned, into their present form. People are apt to think of the Bible as if it were a whole without parts, indivisible, self-existent, in short, a kind of Divinity; or at least, as if it had come down from heaven precisely such as we now have it, ready bound to our hands, if not with the Bible Society's stamp upon it. But the fact is far otherwise; both the Old and New Testament Scriptures are made up of many different portions, written one after another at intervals more or less distant. It was not until the time of Esdras, or (Ezra) that is, almost a thousand years after the first four books of the Bible were written by Moses, that they and the other books which had been added through succeeding ages were collected into the single volume which we call the Old Testament; and as to the New Testament, though this was all written in the course of one generation, yet it was by no means at the same time, for between the writing of the earliest Gospel by St. Matthew, and that of the latest by St. John, there was an interval of almost half a century; and not only were the several books written at different times, but those to whom they were respectively addressed

were far divided from each other by land and sea. In process of time, however, the scattered portions were brought together, and carefully examined by councils, that is, by assemblies of Bishops of the Catholic Church; and being gathered at last with the Scriptures of the Old Testament into a single volume, were called the Bible, that is, *the book*; the sacred Book of God and the Church.

I shall have an opportunity of telling you more about this early period another time; at present I must go on to show you how this sacred book was preserved and guarded by the Church in after-ages against the rage of heathen persecutors, at the expense of the blood of her most faithful and devoted children. Read the account given us in history of the martyrdom of Felix, Bishop of Tibiura, a small place in Africa. The chief magistrate of the town, acting on orders just received from the Roman emperor, went to him, and demanded the sacred Scriptures. "I have them," said Felix, "but I will not give them up." "The word of the emperor," answered the magistrate, "must prevail over your saying: give them to me, that I may burn them." "It were better," replied Felix, "that you should burn me than the divine Scriptures; for God must be obeyed rather than man." The magistrate persisted; but Felix continued firm in his refusal, he gave him three days for reflection, and then, finding his mind unchanged, sent him to the proconsul, or chief governor of the province, who loaded him with chains, and threw him into prison. Again and again he summoned him into his presence; but he constantly said the same thing: "I have the holy Scriptures in my possession; but I will not give them up;" so that at last, having been sent from place to place, and from governor to governor, he was condemned to die by the sword, and as he bowed his head to receive the blow, he thanked our Lord Jesus Christ that he had preserved the Gospel. Another was brought before the judge with the sacred volume in his hands. "Read," said the judge, in mockery; the holy confessor opened the book and read: "Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven;" and again: "If any one will come after Me, let him take up his cross and follow Me." "What means that?" asked the judge; and Euplius (such was the name of the holy martyr) told him that it was the law of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. On which confession he was delivered up to the torture; and, before it began, they asked him tauntingly what he would now say on the matter; when he, making the sign of the cross on his forehead, answered: "I confess again what I said before; I am a Christian, and I read the holy Scriptures." Then they asked him why he had kept those books against the command of the emperors, instead of giving them up? "Because," he said, "I am a Christian, and it is not lawful for me to give them up; I had rather die." Then they put him to the torture; and throughout his agonies he kept continually giving thanks to our Lord; and even when his voice had failed him through extremity of pain, his lips still moved in praise. When the torture was ended, he was condemned to death, and led forth to execution, with the copy of the Gospel, which had been found upon him, hung round his neck. These are only two instances among very many; for this was a persecution of exceeding fierceness, and for the most part endured with noble constancy. Some there were, indeed, as might be expected, who yielded to the force of torture; but they were held a scandal and a shame to their brethren. To them first was applied the name of *traitor*, (which means, "give up,") infamous in all ages; and it was not till after long and severe penance that they were restored, if at all, to the communion of the faithful.

Thus you see how the Church was the guardian of the Bible through the ages of persecution; but you will say perhaps that these were early days; that the Church was not then corrupt as the Catholic Church is now, but pure and holy like a Protestant Church; and that therefore her hatred of holy Scripture had not yet begun. How comes it then, that it is the Catholic Church which at the present day bears in loving remembrance those who thus died for the Scriptures, honoring them among her white-robed army of martyrs; while by Protestant Churches their names are never so much as mentioned? The Catholic Church commemorates the first of these noble martyrs, St. Felix, on the 24th of October, and St. Euplius on the 12th of August; whereas the Protestants never commemorate them at all; they know nothing whatever about them.

But let us next go on to inquire what the conduct of the Catholic Church has been with reference to holy Scripture during those after-ages, when, in the opinion of Protestants, the mystery of iniquity within her was fully developed. How did the Church behave towards the Bible during "the dark ages?"

(To be continued.)

THE EARL OF SHREWSBURY—THE EARL OF ARUNDEL.

(From the Dublin Freeman's Journal.)

A LETTER TO THE EARL OF ARUNDEL AND SURREY, M.P. FOR THE CITY OF LIMERICK, AND MEMBER OF THE CATHOLIC DEFENCE ASSOCIATION—By John, Earl of Shrewsbury—(London: Chas. Dolman.)—A pamphlet has just issued from the press under the above title. The interest that necessarily attaches to any publication on the subject of the recent penal bill, from the pen of a man occupying the position of the Earl of Shrewsbury, induces us to lay before our readers such extracts as will enable them to form a just conclusion as to the tone and intent of the publication. His lordship opens the letter with the following sentence:—

"MY DEAR LORD—As a member of the Catholic Defence Association, I am desirous of expressing the views with which I have joined it, and the policy which I think we ought to pursue; whilst I am sure I cannot better recommend my observations to the Catholic public, than by addressing them to you."

Having stated that the government of Lord John Russell, and the policy that has moved it, must "be met by the formation of a party antagonistic to his," he adds:—

"As long as there was a chance of succeeding by reason and argument, it would have been wrong to have resorted to any other means. But now, that the clearest and most indisputable rights are borne down by violence and faction, or sacrificed to bigotry and fanaticism, it would be but scattering chaff upon the wind to carry on the contest by debate and persuasion—but arguing with a whirlwind, or talking to a tempest."

And again:—
"It being, then, impossible for Catholics either to accept office under a minister who has 'treated them with such contumely, such insult, and such flagrant injustice,' or to 'join a party' which has so deceived and betrayed them, it necessarily results that they must either cease to be of any account in the state, no longer exercising their political privileges, or taking any interest in the concerns of the country, but keeping aloof and observing a strict neutrality in an ignominious retreat, wholly surrendering themselves to the evil destiny which oppresses them—or they must unite themselves to some other party, no matter what, which they find in organised and active hostility to the government of this same minister. For this, too, we may find an analogous example in the conduct of the noble lord himself, who, sooner than risk a measure of vital importance to the empire, or drive a hostile government from the path of true policy, gave them his most earnest support; carrying that support so far as to *concur in votes opposed, if not to his principles, to his feelings, his wishes, and his opinions.*"

"That this was a wise and generous policy, none are more forward to acknowledge than those who personally benefited by it; yet I must maintain that, whilst the noble lord's subsequent conduct has wholly and entirely absolved us from every debt of gratitude—already, indeed, repaid by more than twenty years of constant and zealous support of his party and his administration—it has so fully justified us in the course which I presume the association intends to adopt—to carry on an uncompromising parliamentary opposition to every measure on which there is a chance of leaving the minister in a minority, as the only means of dislodging him from the hostile position he has assumed.

"Driven to desperation, I see no other course to pursue. The necessity, being extreme, justifies the most extreme measures within the limits of the constitution. A change of ministry is our only hope. The present government cannot retreat with honor, but any other may. If, however, its successor, impelled by a pressure from without, should still refuse to right us, we must equally force it by a pressure from within, and dislodge it in its turn. I trust we have not only the will to resolve, but the power to execute; for, by a happy coincidence, parties are so nearly balanced that even some fifty or sixty members bound together in the same tactics, may so frequently turn the scale as completely to compromise the government, and drive it to surrender at discretion, or to retreat with discomfiture."

Having thus clearly defined the leading object of the pamphlet, the noble author proceeds to expound and defend the principle on which he bases his proposed form of opposition, and cites many parliamentary precedents for the course he advocates. The space we are able to devote to-day to these extracts precludes us from entering into detail into this portion of the brochure.

Our author thus writes of the penal bill:—
"It has ushered a new era in the social and political history of the country, and, like the fault of Chatham,

* Speech of Lord John Russell, December 17, 1831.