

THE TRUE WITNESS AND CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

commentary upon it, and they put what may be called a stupid question, but one likely to bring ridicule in the eyes of the multitude upon the doctrine of the resurrection. And it is in answer to this that Our Blessed Saviour speaks at once in these decisive words of my text—"You err," He says, "not knowing the Scripture, nor the power of God." These two things must go together. It is not enough to know the Scriptures unless we are prepared likewise to know the power of God—unless we believe in this power—unless we make this power the very key to their interpretation.

Such, my brethren, are the words of Our Blessed Redeemer to those who would make their own judgment, their reason, their sense, the interpreter of His word.

[His Eminence then went on with great eloquence to develop this principle of Protestant unbelief, showing how the Protestant, whilst able to admit the power of God in the material creation, where the evidence of his senses will not allow him to deny it, dares not contemplate the exercise of the same power in things spiritual. To such a degree does he shrink from this admission, that even when on the one hand he has the literal words of Scripture proclaiming a promise, and on the other hand historical facts, (for instance, the universality and unity of the Catholic Church, and the permanence of the Chair of Peter,) fulfilling this promise, his inability to recognise the power of Almighty God, to produce this stupendous spiritual result, makes him resort to the most captious objections to explain away the literal sense of the word of God.]

The Catholic, on the other hand, assumes, as the foundation of all his reasoning respecting religion, that the power of God is absolutely infinite, as unconfin'd in the spiritual as it is in the terrestrial or celestial spheres; and that, consequently, no objection can ever be made to a doctrine or to a practice taught in Scripture, simply on the ground of its being impossible, or difficult, or incomprehensible, or repugnant to sense or feeling. It is enough to know that God Himself has clearly and definitely spoken the word; and the rule of the Catholic Church is at once to accept it literally, and act upon it.

[After most vividly placing before the minds of his hearers the illustration given of the unity of the Catholic Church throughout all time, the Cardinal went on to say]:—

Yes, my brethren, this Catholic Church believes, as truly as she does in the providential government of God in all the affairs of this world, in the existence of the Holy Spirit in the Church, teaching really and truly now all truth, as was promised. Not a single promise do we believe has failed; each has been fulfilled, and continues in its fulfilment. Now, I ask others, who do not hold the Catholic belief, "Why do you not put the same interpretation upon all these words?" The interpretation I have given is the most simple. You cannot possibly, by any means of interpreting, arrive at a more simple meaning than we attach to all the words of the Saviour and His Apostles. And yet you dare not believe it. Why so? Because, having the Scriptures, having in them these words, you do not know them. And why do you not know them? Because you do not know the power of God. You cannot realise to yourselves the idea that where you do not see God producing certain given effects, simply because He has promised these effects are invisibly continued. You see these effects; you see that unity; you see that adherence to dogma; that perfect system that verifies all which the prophecies and Gospel tell us of the kingdom of God; but having in your minds certain prejudices and preconceived opinions, having made up your minds that this cannot be the Church of God, you will not believe that there is an exercise of such power in the world. If Catholics disbelieve the power of God, they could not possibly give this interpretation to these various Scriptures. And it is this which marks the difference between the simple exposition of Catholics of those texts, and the way in which they are evaded and altered by those who have made up their minds not to be Catholics. The Catholic accepts every word—he accepts that the Church is the pillar and ground of truth; that the Holy Ghost is ever with her, teaching her all truth; that the Blessed Redeemer has promised to be with His Apostles and their successors always to the end of time; that the charge given to Peter is perpetuated as necessary to the existence of the Church; and that he who sits upon the Pontifical throne is the Shepherd of the sheep, and holds the keys of the kingdom as given to Peter. He accepts all this, because he believes it to be perfectly possible, and because he believes that, having spoken these words, God meant them to have efficacious power; and as they depended on that power for execution, it cannot be wanting. Others interpret these words in an unnatural or less literal sense, because it would involve in their minds the existence of a power in the Church such as they cannot make up their minds to believe it has pleased God to exercise. And then what remains? I put that picture, which I have faintly drawn, before one determined never to accept the claims of the Catholic Church, and I say, "Account for all this? I account for it by placing together the promise of God and the power of God. Now, how do you account for the endurance of this compact power? You, who have not been in existence for three hundred years, have separated and split into hundreds of different sects—account to me for this wonderful preservation of dogma, this inviolable unity?" You must say the Church of God is unchangeable. Why, I am told that, at every turn, in every religious meeting, from every pulpit, in the daily, and monthly, and yearly press, in every form even to letters, and using the words which I have received within the last few hours with reference to the discourses I am delivering, "It is the masterpiece

of Satan!" Our Blessed Redeemer came down from Heaven to establish a system of religion; He came down to institute Christianity, which God had promised to the whole ends of the earth; He came to found a Church which should support and keep vigorous hold of all the truths He should deliver; He promised to her that perpetual assistance which we have seen; and we are to be told that when a body is presented to us which has these qualities and clear marks—when we see unity and peace, preservation of doctrine, permanence and stability, we are to be told that this is the work of God's infernal foe! And the kingdom of Christ, where is it? In a small multitude of those who are at war among themselves, who cannot agree upon the definition of one single dogma, who dispute whether or not it is by baptism a man is to be made a child of grace, who are broken into denominations of every strange name and every eccentric form—this scattered band; all collected together from every opinion, from every strange fancy, is to be looked upon as the Kingdom of Christ!

And He who told us that a kingdom divided against itself should not stand, and that that was the characteristic of the kingdom of His enemy—Oh! shall He be told, except it be in blasphemy, which God forbid, that what shows us a conformity exactly answering to what He came to found, which presents to us the characteristics of His kingdom, is the matchless work of His eternal enemy; and that what He came to found bears upon it the stamp of confusion, and clearly of destruction—that it is Babel rather than Jerusalem—that it is the confusion of tongues rather than the union of hearts? Can any one, my brethren, blind himself so far as this, as to boast that the Kingdom of Christ is to be found in what, to the impartial looker-on, must present the appearance of discomfited and defeated hosts flying in all directions, and drawing their weapons against themselves, rather than in that host of Israel which goes forward compact, singing triumphantly the songs of Zion, and increasing, not merely by straggling numbers, but adding by hundreds to the strength and phalanx of its conquering ranks? Oh! my brethren, if this be the result of what has been promised to us, let us bow down our heads in humiliation, and wonder at the mysterious dealings of God, who hath thus given to His enemy the power to construct, and hath reserved to Himself only that to disperse!

Our Blessed Redeemer has entered a synagogue in Galilee, and is instructing the multitude. Let us listen for a moment at its door. What do we hear? Wrangling voices angry and loud. What do they say?—"How shall this man give us His flesh to eat?" See, after a pause, during which, no doubt, sweet and holy words have been spoken, there comes rushing forth an angry multitude, with countenances inflamed with wrath, eyes sparkling with fury, blanched lips muttering almost curses. What do they say?—"This is a hard saying, and who can believe it?" Are these Sadducees or Pharisees?—They are disciples: they are flying from Jesus; they are flying from Him for ever. They go back, and walk no more with Him. And what is it that has provoked this extraordinary wrath?—He has been teaching them a wonderful doctrine. He has been saying, "Amen, Amen, I say unto you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye shall have no life in you. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth me shall live for ever." Strange doctrine—wonderful and hard—hard indeed to flesh and blood! And how are these men met? They have been divided into two parts, one of which we have already heard saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat? This is a hard saying; who can bear it?" They have left Him. There remain the others, and what are their words? Jesus has turned round and appealed to them: "Will you also leave me?" And they replied through Peter, ever faithful, "To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Here is the criterion again applied. Those words which Jesus spoke with His own blessed lips have become a part of the written word; they are now the Scriptures, and we may easily apply our test. How did those men err? They erred not knowing the Scriptures, *i.e.*, not knowing the words which Jesus spoke. Was it that they misunderstood His words? Was it that they construed them wrong? Was it that they did not apply to them proper tests of explanation? No, my brethren; they knew not the Scripture; they knew not these words; but still more, they knew not the power of God. "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" is an expression of disidence, of disbelief of the possibility of doing. It is a hard saying—it is hard to reconcile it with affection, with principles, even, perhaps it may be said, with our moral feeling; therefore we will not believe this doctrine. Those men had seen our Blessed Lord perform a miracle but a few hours before, in feeding five thousand men from five loaves and two small fishes! In that miracle they believed; they saw it with their senses; it came under the cognisance of their visual organs. But they could not reason by analogy—their minds were too unrefined and carnal to do so; they could not say, "If He has given us evidence of His power in the miracle which we have seen performed, how should we doubt in that which He has just spoken?" Had He said, "I will feed five thousand men with a few loaves," they might likewise have previously said, "This is a hard saying, for no such miracle has ever been seen upon earth." But they had conviction that our Blessed Redeemer could do more than they had seen done; and it was but reasonable to expect from them that when He said, "I will give you my flesh to eat and my blood to drink," they would not measure it by the rule of possibility or impossibility; but what was promised was to be received in Faith, and it was to be left to Him to use His power to perform His own work as He knew best. And the Apostles through Peter applied our rule. "Will you likewise leave me?"

"No," says Peter, "I do not see, I do not understand how that which Thou hast spoken of can be done; but Thou hast the words of eternal life; I know that what Thou sayest must be true, however impossible it may appear; I will cling to Thee; I will go wheresoever Thou goest, and remain where Thou remainest; I will be taught by Thee, and receive Thy doctrines, however difficult in principle or impossible they may appear."

These are two simple rules. It is clear the Saviour addresses the words, "You err," not because they had mistaken His meaning, but because they chose not to apply this test of interpretation, a perfect assurance of the power of God to do whatever He tells you He will do. Then apply it now, my brethren. Oh! how that doctrine of ours, which takes the words literally and at the same time in a most beautifully spiritual manner, is reviled and ridiculed! And at this very moment there are upon walls in this metropolis hideous descriptions as they appear to the Catholic eye, sounds of blasphemy equal to those heard in the synagogue of Judea implying a disbelief in the possibility of God doing that which the Catholic believes He has done. How is this doctrine met? Oh! my brethren, the Scriptures could not err. "This is my body; this is my blood." "He that eateth me shall live by me." "Unless ye eat of the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you shall have no life in you." Flesh, blood, body—all words as literal as possible." And the Catholic at once says, "I accept and believe them as they are; and why? Because I believe God has power to present to me this body and this blood in any form which He has chosen to institute; because though I do not see, nor feel, nor taste them, yet God having spoken the word, I can have no doubt but He is all-powerful to do whatever He has said." What is the source of objection against this doctrine? That you must interpret these words figuratively; that it is only the type or symbol of Christ's body that is meant; that eating represents believing; that body means bread; that blood denotes wine; and that, in fact, there is not one single word in all these texts which are to be taken literally. And why? Because you are told it is repugnant to sense. "The body of Christ," says the Common Prayer Book, "being in Heaven cannot be upon earth." "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" "It is impossible, because a body in one place cannot be in another place." "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" "It is contrary to reason, because a body has certain dimensions, has form, and circumference, and parts, and cannot be compressed into the small space of the consecrated elements." "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" "How is it possible, when it is repugnant to my own senses which God has given me to overrule the declarations of His own power? My own senses, which are supreme, and have at their feet the teachings of God that I may try them and probe them, tell me it is impossible that there can be a body presented to me without my seeing or seeing it, or having some cognisance of it?" "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" "He cannot; because I cannot conceive how He could do it." This is the popular objection against the Real Presence in the Sacrament. It is a questioning of the power of God. The Catholic believes fully in that power; a Protestant makes up his mind that God's power is to be judged by those means which he himself possesses. It is like a man who would go, I will not say to the Pyramids, but to the chain of the Alps or the Andes, and take out his foot-ruler with a determination to measure round their bases, and ascertain their various dimensions. Or, it is like one who would go across the ocean with a ball of twine in his hand to measure the breadth of the far-rolling deep, and say that he is able with his small means to arrive at accurate calculations. It is truly like that vision which St. Augustine is said to have beheld when taught humility in judging of the things of God. He saw a child upon the sea shore vainly endeavoring to scoop out the waters of the ocean to a small hole made in the sand, and when smilingly he instructed the child, that vision sent and showed how foolish and impracticable was what he had undertaken. "And is it more foolish?" that child said, "than for you to pretend to comprehend the mysteries of religion, and what God has taught, by the small measure of your intellect and soul?" Yes, my brethren, every day and every hour are those arguments unblushingly brought forth, that the Real Presence in transubstantiation is not only false, but that it is absurd, impossible, blasphemous, everything that is not believed in the power of God. They say it is a hard saying, and they cannot believe it.

If, my brethren, any of you should have chanced to step into this church at certain appointed hours each morning, or, perhaps, each evening, you might see one of the faithful, poor indeed, perhaps, kneeling for a time before the altar in serious and rapt meditation, striking, perhaps, now and then, his breast, raising his eyes, from which tears are starting; and after a time you might see him, with slow step and dejected countenance, go forth and enter one of those doors which break the walls around this church. And, perhaps, at another place, you will see similarly entering in one that is young, but bears upon her the mark of high dissipation and sin, who seems unused, perhaps, to the holiness of this place—who, ere she dares to enter, stands imploring grace at the threshold, and then rushes forward and disappears from sight. After a time each comes forth with bearing countenance and with step erect goes forward and kneels before the altar in gratitude and joy. You see in the first the contrite, broken-hearted sinner, and you see in the second the penitent sinner consoled and forgiven. And what do you say if you are not a Catholic? "Oh! blasphemous Priest, thou art in there bringing to thee the sinners who are grievously offending God, and making them believe that by the uplifting of thy hands their sins are forgiven, and that they go forth, as they imagine, children of grace! It cannot be; who can forgive sins but God?"

Our Blessed Redeemer is in a house teaching. He is surrounded by a dense multitude. It is impossible to enter in by the door. Suddenly they are startled by the noise of workmen above. The roof is opened; a bed is let down; a man is upon it, helpless from palsy; his limbs are immovable; his whole frame is shrivelled, and he is unable to stand. His friends have brought him to the feet of Jesus. He is afflicted with a terrible malady indeed, which his friends are anxious to have cured; but there is another—a darker, deeper, and unseen plague that has possession of his heart. The man is deeply immersed in sin, and Jesus seems to take notice of that disease of the body for which his friends were anxious he should have relief, and also of the plague with which his soul is polluted, for He says at once, "Thy sins are forgiven thee."

And what do men say around him? "Who is this that blasphemeth? Who can forgive sins but God alone? He is again in the house of a Pharisee. He is there surrounded by enemies who are watching every look and every action. There enters in one who was well known for her sins to the whole company. She comes in, but she does at length approach. She throws herself at the feet of Jesus; she washes them with her tears, and wipes them with the hair of her head, but she speaks not a word. Jesus speaks not, but He knows what others do not. They declare from her notoriety that she is a sinner, and that He is not a prophet, because He has allowed her to approach. At last He addresses her, and tells her that her sins are forgiven. And what do they around say? "This man blasphemeth! how can he forgive sins?" My brethren, what a similar picture is this to what we may witness in this our Church? How similar the words spoken to those addressed to those who call themselves the Ministers of Christ? And now, my brethren, how does the Redeemer deal with the case? He does not say, "I am the Son of God; God Himself; and true as it is that no one can forgive sin but God and God alone, your condemnation does not apply to me, because I, being God, have that power which you do not acknowledge." No, my brethren, He withheld this high and complete refutation of the cruel doctrine of the Pharisees, and He chose rather to lay down a doctrine such as should be applicable to every time. "Is it easier?" He says, "to say, 'Rise up and walk,' or, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee?'" Now, in other words, He means, "If I can do the one, if you believe that I can perform one miracle, you ought to be ready to believe that I can perform the other. If I, the Son of Man, (for so He is there pleased to call Himself) have power to raise this man from the dead, then, if I choose to say, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee,' I have equal power, and you have to believe equally in that power though you see no change as the fruit of my words. If God alone gives sin, He forgives them in Heaven; but that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power upon earth to forgive sin, He says to the paralytic, 'Take up thy bed and walk.'" And he justifies the other case by the love shown to Him in His humanity by the person who came to seek a remedy for sin. Now, take the whole case as thus set before us. Our Blessed Lord afterwards spoke these words to His Apostles, "Whose sins soever ye shall forgive on earth, shall be forgiven in Heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in Heaven." There is an exercise therefore of a power of forgiving sin to be put into execution upon earth by persons to whom Our Blessed Redeemer communicated in the very same words this very same power which He used. Now, what makes the difference between the Catholic and Protestant interpretation of these words, "Whose sins ye forgive on earth shall be forgiven in Heaven?" The difference is exactly that which the two instances in Our Saviour's life suggests. You do not believe that the Priest on earth can forgive sins, because you cannot believe that such power has been given to man upon earth. You think it is blasphemous because it is an exercise of the power of God by man. And yet Our Saviour clearly exercises that power; and in two examples He allowed the same objection to be made by His adversaries; and His words went to prove that He had power to do invisibly to the soul what He did visibly with regard to the body, and He thus gives a key to the interpretation of those texts. But why will not Protestants accept this interpretation? Because they cannot believe in the existence of such a power in the hands of man. It is repugnant to their feelings and imaginations, and to their conceptions of God's dealings with man, to allow that He has committed or left such a power; and they cannot understand how, after eighteen hundred years has elapsed, there should exist this invisible power. The Catholic believes in the power of God. He considers that eighteen hundred years has no more weakened this power than eighteen hundred years has weakened any part of creation. He believes in the power of God and in the words of Christ. The Catholic doctrine of forgiving sins springs up naturally and clearly. It is founded on the ground that though we may have no visible outward sense of it, it can be believed. And the Catholic accepts this doctrine as one of the various means by which the Church exercises the power of the keys entrusted to her.

I might illustrate this objection by farther examples, for instance, Purgatory or Indulgences, or the doctrine of Communion of Saints. But I hope to enter more largely into details in subsequent lectures. At present there is one topic, and one only, by which I would further illustrate this manner of reasoning as the most fruitful source of objections to Catholic doctrines.

Our Blessed Saviour upon one occasion alluded to the existence of a form of virtue which until that time was unknown in the world. He began by saying, "Not all men take these words," and He concluded by words no less impressive—"Let him who can take these words take them." It was not to be a precept consequently for all His Church; it was to be the choice of a few and favored souls. And the Apostle enters more fully into that same doctrine when he so strongly recommended as a more exalted state of life when frail beings here upon earth trample under foot the world and its promises, cast beneath them the allurements which it spreads around, march forward on a thorny and straighter path of virtue, aim at higher and purer spheres of life, love to take the flight of the dove on the wings of contemplation to the very pure bosom of God, see no more of earth but its miseries for which to pray, or its misfortunes which to assuage, or its sufferings to which to minister, and dividing life between the service of Christ in the communion of souls and affection with Him, and in the service of those that are most dear to Him, look for no reward here upon earth, but hope one day to receive far more than compensation for every willing privation in their glorious approach to the land without spot, and in singing to Him through eternity the incomparable canticles of the chaste! Yes, my brethren, that is the state of life to which Our Saviour alludes, and which the Apostle more fully explains. And these words, like many more, fell like seed upon good ground, ready for its reception; and it was not many years after these words were spoken when the deserts of Egypt, which defied the cultivating hands of Pharaoh, sprung up with the lily and the rose, and fountains gushed forth to carry the waters of salvation to the ends of the earth. These anchorites, these pilgrims of the desert, were men whose hands were not unused to toil, but whose souls were still more used to contemplate. And from that early age there began to retire from home and to bid adieu to earth, and to rank, and to esteem, and every family tie—virgins