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TRACTS FOR THE MILLION.

HOW DID ENGLAND BECOME CATHOLIC? AND HOW DID ENGLAND BECOME PROTESTANT?

HOW DID ENGLAND BECOME PROTESTANT?
We have now seen how England became Christian; and perhaps it has been a surprise to some who had never before looked into the matter, to find that her conversion to Christianity and to Catholicism was one and the same thing: that Antichrist, (as they have been used to account him,) and no other, was the first preacher of Christ to the English people.

We have seen, too, how gladly the people listened to that preaching, and how rapidly the faith spread among them, though they were not at that time one kingdom as now, but several. Still, as signal-fires kindled on mountain-tops have sometimes carried in an instant the tidings of a glad event, from one end of a country to the other, so it was with the light of the Gospel. First, shining on the shores of Kent, it flashed from thence, as in a moment, to distant Northumberland; then the eastern provinces caught it; then, in turn, the midland, the southern, and the western; and the faith thus established lasted undisturbed for about a thousand years.

During this period, England was part of the great Christian family, knit with all the other nations of Europe in the bond of a common faith, and a common obedience to the head of the Church, the successor of St. Peter. There were wars and fightings during this period, between kingdom and kingdom, just as there are now; but there was at least one tie of brotherhood which bound the men of different nations to each other; the dove with the olive-branch of peace hovered at least over the ark of God; all were alike children of the Church. If an Englishman was away from his country, lonely, and sick of strange faces and strange voices, he had but to go to the house of God, and he could fancy himself at home again. There he would be greeted by the same words and sounds that he had been used to in his own village-church in England; he would assist at the same holy sacrifice; he would hear the tones of the same Latin tongue, the common language of the Church in all lands; the very sounds of the music,—the lights on the altar,—the sweet breath of the incense,—all these things would be to him dear and familiar.

And, as we were one in faith with other nations, so we were also one with ourselves. There was no doubt then whether our babes were regenerated in their baptism,—no dispute about faith and works,—no question as to whether or not our Lord is to be adored as God. On these, and all other points of Catholic doctrine, the whole English people believed as one man. And, as agreement gives strength, England was strong in faith, and abundant in those noble deeds which are the fruits of faith; for during those thousand years sprung up all those beautiful churches which are still the pride of our country, all our glorious cathedrals, all our most important public charities, the grammar-schools in our towns, meant for the children of the poor, and our two great Universities. All these were the growth of Catholic piety, though Catholics are now shut out from the benefit of them. And other buildings too there were, of great usefulness to all, but especially to the poor, which exist no longer except in their beautiful ruins. But of this we shall speak presently; for we must come at once to our main subject, How did Catholic England become Protestant?

Now she became Protestant by slow degrees; that is to say, it took some time to bring her into her present state as to matters of religion, but it was by a single act that she ceased to be Catholic. A single stroke of the axe cut her off from the tree of which she had been a living branch; but it required many and many a stroke to hew the dead wood into an idol for the people to worship. That first stroke was dealt by one of her kings; King Henry VIII. declared himself and his kingdom independent of the Pope, in spiritual things as well as temporal, and himself the Supreme Head of the Church in England. And this supreme headship his son also held after him, a child of nine years old; and his daughter Elizabeth held and vigorously exercised the same. And in like manner, Queen Victoria, at the present day, bears the title and fills the office of Supreme Head of the English Church.

Let us examine a little into the cause of this strange act unheard of before in the history of Christendom; and judge for ourselves whether the counsel that prompted it came from God.

King Henry VIII. had been married for seventeen years to a Spanish princess named Catherine, and had several children by her, when he suddenly perceived that his conscience was troubled with scruples as to the lawfulness of his marriage, because his wife had been before married, or, more probably, only

espoused to his brother Arthur, who had died before he was fifteen years old. People rather smiled at Henry's scruples, and had small faith in their sincerity; for though such marriages, like those between first cousins, were not allowed by the Church in a general way, yet, as she did not consider them as actually sinful, but only undesirable, she reserved to herself the right of allowing them in certain cases, which allowance was called a Dispensation. All people were quite contented in those days to leave such matters to be settled by the Church; for they did not pretend to be wiser than the Church, and thought the Church was more likely to know what was right than any single individual, however clever or learned he might be. Therefore, as Henry had received a dispensation for his marriage with Catherine, no one, as I have said, was very ready to believe that he could really be in much trouble of conscience on the subject; and as the queen was eight years older than himself, they thought it highly probable that some other reason lay at the bottom of the scruple. And so it proved, for it was very soon no secret that the king was in love with a young lady of the court named Anne Boleyn, and was desperately bent on making her his wife. His first step was to endeavor to prevail on the Pope, by entreaties, by promises, and by threats, to declare his marriage with Catherine unlawful, and so to sanction his putting her away, and marrying another woman.

Would St. Gregory the Great, think you, have granted such a request? Would St. Peter, his predecessor? Certainly not; and neither did his successor, the Pope of King Henry's time. If we were but acquainted with the history of Catholic days, of which we are brought up in worse than ignorance, we should see how, in spite of their having been some very few—bad Popes, (just as there was a Judas among the Apostles,) yet, on the whole, the Popes were the protectors of the weak, and, above all, the guardians of the sanctity of marriage. Often and often the fierce kings of this world quarrelled with them, and rebelled against them on this very account; but none so fiercely, or with such fatal consequences, as this Henry of England. For, as we have said, when the Pope refused to grant him leave to work his will, he made short work of the matter, cut off himself and his people from obedience to the Pope, and therefore from the Catholic Church, and proclaimed his own supreme headship. How he exercised the same, whether the people of England found it easier to be governed in spiritual things by a king than by a Pope, we shall see presently; but I will now just rapidly follow out his domestic history to the end, that we may see of what stuff his character was made.

He was too impatient to wait for a divorce, or any thing of the kind; so he first married Anne privately, and then set up a spiritual court under Thomas Cranmer, whom he had made Archbishop of Canterbury, and of whom I will tell you presently, to pronounce him divorced from Catherine. This marriage turned out much as one would expect. Henry soon grew tired of his new wife, as he had of his old one, and fell in love, as before, with one of the ladies in waiting; but this time he dealt in no such mild measures as a divorce; or at least, the divorce was immediately followed by a stroke yet more decisive. The poor frail thing, for whose sake he had cut off his country from the Church, was seized, sent to the Tower, tried on contradictory charges,—some true perhaps, some impossible,—found guilty, however, (for all knew the king's pleasure,) and at last beheaded on Tower Hill; while Henry, to show his joy, dressed himself in white garments, (as she had done in her short-sighted folly, some weeks back, at the death of the good Queen Catherine,) and the very next day was publicly married to Jane Seymour.

This third wife happily died in child-bed, in about a year from this time and, after her, we read of another wife divorced, and another beheaded; and a sixth, who, though she did at last manage to survive him, yet ran sundry very narrow risks of her life. Indeed, towards the close of his reign, the tyrant Henry seems absolutely to have lived on blood. He had become, by that time, bloated almost out of the shape of humanity, and a prey to fearful disease; yet none dared whisper to him that his end was drawing near, for his savageness had grown into almost frenzy; and at last death came, and saved many noble heads which were waiting in prison for the stroke of the executioner.

Such was Henry VIII., the Ethelbert of the new Christianity in England. Which do you like the best? Which, think you, did Almighty God like the best? Which, do you think, acted most like a Christian? And whose Christianity do you prefer? But wait a moment; let us first hear a little about the Augustin of this new Christianity.

Thomas Cranmer, whom we have before mentioned,

was first brought into notice, while still a Cambridge scholar, by suggesting that the question of the king's marriage should be submitted to all the Universities in Europe. This delighted the king, as it gave him the prospect of being able to make out something of a case against the Pope; and from that moment Cranmer became his chief favorite, and was soon made by him Archbishop of Canterbury. At his consecration as Archbishop, he had, of course, to take the usual oath of obedience to the Pope; but nevertheless, we find him perfectly ready to take the oath of supremacy, as it is called, so soon as the king required it of him, though the object of that oath was precisely to renounce obedience to the Pope, and to promise it to the king instead.

Then, again, he was in the secret of the king's private marriage with Anne Boleyn; yet he presided at a spiritual court held after that marriage, and there declared Henry's first marriage with Catherine unlawful, urging him afterwards, "at his soul's peril, to discontinue such incestuous intercourse."

After this, as the tyrant's will changed, he pronounced just as readily his divorce from Anne Boleyn, or rather declared that marriage from the beginning to have been null and void, and the issue thereof illegitimate; while, at the same time, in his place in Parliament, he voted her death as an unfaithful wife. In short, there was no need of injustice, nor as we shall presently see, of rapine or blood, for which King Henry did not find a ready abject tool in Cranmer.

But, you will say, there must have been a great deal to be said for the king's supremacy, or people would not have received it; a claim never before heard of in Christendom could scarcely have been listened to, unless very strong arguments had been brought forward in its support. And strong arguments certainly were brought forward,—not drawn exactly from Scripture or from reason, but sufficiently convincing, as it seemed, to the men of that generation, viz., the axe, the halter, and the quartering block. And some, very many, really endured these things rather than part with their Catholic birthright; for you must not suppose that all in that age were Cranmers. Sir Thomas More, the best Lord High Chancellor whom England ever had, died in this cause; so too, did Dr. Fisher, Bishop of Rochester; and multitudes among the people suffered under the hangman's hands, all that frightful process of disembowling and quartering, which has been the disgrace of our country, as the punishment of treason, almost to our own days.

Let us now see how this supremacy was first exercised. There are few parts of England where there are not to be found old ruins of a peculiar character, masses of gray stones, covered with the ivy of three centuries; yet not so covered but that we may see that they are the remains of buildings of exceeding beauty; for the garlands of wild flowers, which seem to grow there with more than common luxuriance, twine in and out through the rich stone work of pointed windows, or fling themselves abroad in long streamers, where a tall shaft, round which they have been clinging, breaks short off, just as it was beginning to curve upwards into a bold arch. I am sure the memory of almost every one must supply a scene answering more or less to this description; for the names of Tintern, and Glastonbury, and Wenlock, and Furness, are almost as familiar to us as those of London and York.

Let us just try to picture to ourselves what the face of the country must have been when these buildings yet stood in their entireness, each in the midst of smiling cultivated fields, and each inhabited by a large community: for these were no other than the monasteries and convents of which we have all heard tell.

We have seen that St. Augustin and his fellows were monks, and that Ethelbert granted for their use a mansion in Canterbury, thus founding the first English convent; and, after him, many an English King gave lands and money for the building of such in other parts of the country; and more than one, at the close of life, even laid down their sceptres and retired to one of those quiet dwellings, to prepare for death in penitence and prayer. But King Henry saw these things in a different light. He looked on the broad abbey-lands, and thinking their revenues would be better poured in to the royal treasury than remaining in the hands of their rightful owners, determined once and for ever to sweep away all the religious orders in England, and to seize on their possessions for himself and his nobles, whom he bribed by a share in the spoils to assist in carrying out his wicked project.

To give it something like a color of justice, he sent out a royal commission to inquire into the state of the monasteries, and to report abuses. We can easily imagine what amount of fair play the monasteries had to expect under such circumstances; and no one pretends that they had fair play at all. "Where

only a pretence was wanted for their suppression," says a Protestant writer, "it was easy for a prince possessed of such unlimited power to find or feign one . . . and care was taken to defame those whom the court intended to ruin."

Yet, though even Protestants allow this, and though little enough, after all, came out against the monks in the report of the commissioners, still the impression has remained on the mind of the English people, that the monastic life was so idle and useless, that, however ruffianly it was to destroy the monasteries, still it is any how to be rejoiced at, that we are rid of the monks. But I think people would feel differently on the subject, if they only looked at it a little, and that in one or two different points of view.

Think of the beautiful abbey church,—and every monastery had its church,—not left, like England's churches now-a-days, to dust and to cobwebs from Sunday to Sunday; but upon every day in the week, and all day long, with Masses at all hours of the morning, and holy offices of prayer and praise going on from sunrise to sunset, and almost from sunset to sunrise again in some of them. Surely the presence of such churches up and down the land must have been useful, if it be useful for people, in the midst of the bustle of this working world, to be reminded that they have souls.

Or, if you despise the convent church, you would scarcely have despised the convent school, where the children of the poor flocked for instruction, and where many who were discovered to possess talents above the common order, received such an education as enabled them to rise to any station for which their talents or dispositions may have fitted them. How many of the great men who rose from low degree in those days, were first trained in the convent school! Then the monks were the best of landlords and the best of masters; and from their continually adding to their buildings and improving their lands, must have given constant employment to the poor in their neighborhood.

I say nothing of their actual alms-deeds, of the sick and aged who thronged their doors, as they still do the doors of convents everywhere, and were never sent away empty. This lavish alms-giving of convents is always sneered at by men of the world as foolish and hurtful; and I have not time now to stop and dispute the matter with them. But religious bodies have always considered their revenues as the patrimony of the poor; and that the poor, in asking alms, are only claiming the payment of a debt which they have no right to withhold from them. And, after all, what have Protestants given in exchange for this "foolish and hurtful" charity?

Poor-laws, by which all classes are burdened, and poor-houses, in which the poor are punished for their poverty; where food is dealt out in the smallest possible quantities, on which human creatures can live, and where man puts asunder those whom God has joined together.

But to return to our history. It is difficult to believe what followed after the return of the royal commission, and yet it is true. Six hundred and forty-five monasteries were suppressed; in some of these, the monks, terrified by threats, and persuaded by the promise of a provision for their lives, gave up their property without resistance; others refused to do so, and their lives were the forfeit. Thus the last Abbot of Glastonbury was hanged, drawn, and quartered, for high treason, on the Torre Hill, which overlooks his noble abbey. Ninety colleges, more than 2000 chapels, and 110 hospitals, were utterly destroyed. It is impossible to describe the scene of spoliation,—whole libraries of books were torn in pieces for the sake of their jewelled clasps and embroidered covers; the convents were absolutely sacked for plunder; the very churches were pillaged; tombs broken open; and the sacred vessels of the altar seized and borne away to the tyrant. And, last of all, the buildings themselves were to be pulled down; for Henry well knew how dearly the people loved them, and that they would never rest in quiet till all hope was gone that their friends would ever be restored to their possessions.

Yes, whatever the people of England now think of monasteries, in those days they loved them dearly, and there was a bitter cry through the length and breadth of the land when the king raised his hand against them. But it was the cry of the poor, and none heeded it: by fire and sword at first, and by the hand of the executioner afterwards, it was soon put down, and the monasteries, dwellings, churches, and all, were pulled stone from stone, or blown up with gunpowder, and left much as we now see them. Any who read the account of those days, would think it was a story of wild barbarous heathens plundering a conquered country, not of a Christian people reforming their religion.

But others besides monks fell under the wrath of Henry. At this time, what are called Protestant