

THE TRADITIONS AGAINST CATHOLICS.

I have given you a specimen of the Tradition of Literature; now proceed to the Tradition of Wealth, Respectability, Virtue, and Enlightened Religion; for all these in a country like ours, are supposed to go together, the Tradition of our merchants, traders, and men of business, and of all who have anything to lose, and are, therefore, conscientiously attached to the constitution. And I shall select, as the organ of their Tradition, a writer whom they will at once acknowledge to be an unexceptionable representative of their ideas. If there be a periodical of the day which lays claim to knowledge of this globe, and of all that is in it, which is catholic in its range of subjects, its minute curiosity, and its world-wide correspondence, which has dealings with all the religions of the earth, and ought to have the largeness and liberality of view which such manifold intercourse is calculated to create, it is the *Times* newspaper. No man vows so steady a devotion to the great moral precepts embodied in the Decalogue, as its conductors, or profess so fine a sense of honour and duty, or are so deeply conscious of their own influence on the community, and of the responsibilities which it involves, or are so alive to the truth of the maxim, that, in the general run of things, honesty is the best policy. What noble, manly, disinterested sentiments do they utter! what upright intention, strong sense, and sturdy resolution, are the staple of their compositions! what indignation do they manifest at the sight of vice or baseness! what detestation of trickery! what solemn resolve to uphold the oppressed! what generous sympathy with innocence calumniated! what rising of heart against tyranny! what gravity of reprobation! how, when Catholic and Protestant are in fierce political antagonism, they can mourn over breaches of charity, in which they protest the while they had no share! with what lively sensibility and withering scorn do they encounter the accusation, made against them by rivals every half-dozen years, of venality or tergiversation! If anywhere is to be found the sternness of those who are severe because they are pure—who may securely cast stones, for none can cast at them—who, like the cherub in the poem, are "faithful found among the faithless," you would say that here at length you had found the incorruptible and infallible, the guides in a bad world, who, amid the illusions of reason and the sophistries of passion, see the path of duty on all questions whatever, with a luminousness, a keenness and a certainty special to themselves. When, then, I would illustrate the value of the Anti-Catholic Traditions as existing among the money-making classes of the community, I cannot fix upon a more suitable sample than the statements of these accomplished writers. Accordingly I refer to their columns; and toward the end of a leading article, in the course of the last month or six weeks, I find the following sentence:—"It is the practice, as our readers are aware, in Roman Catholic countries, for the clergy to post up a list of *all the crimes* to which human frailty can be tempted, placing opposite to them the *exact sum* of money for which their perpetration will be indulged."* And what makes this statement the more emphatic, is the circumstance that, within two or three sentences afterwards,—ever mindful, as I have said, of the Tables of the Law,—the writer takes occasion to refer to the divine prohibition, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour."

Such is a specimen of the Tradition, marvellous to say, as it exists among the classes who are well-to-do in the world. You see, they are so clear on the point, that, for all their mercantile sense of the value of character, their disgust at false intelligence, their severity with fraud, and their sensitiveness at libel, they have no hesitation in handing down to the next generation this atrocious imputation, that the Catholic Church proclaims that she is commissioned by the Moral Governor of the world to bestow on her children permission to perpetrate any sin whatever, for which they have a fancy, on condition of

their paying her a price in money for that perpetration, in proportion to the heinousness of the offence.

Now, this accusation is not only so grave in itself, but, miserable to say, is so industriously circulated, that, before using it for the purpose for which I have introduced it, in order to remove all suspicion against us, I am induced to go out of my way to enunciate, as briefly and clearly as I can, what the Catholic Church really does teach upon the subject. The charge in question then rests on a confusion between the *forgiveness of sins* and *admission to Church communion*, two ideas perfectly distinct from each other, both in themselves and in Catholic theology. Every scandalous sin contains in it, as we consider, two separate offences, the offence against God, and the offence against the Church; just as Protestants would allow that murder is at once a sin against God and our neighbour, a sin in the eyes of God, and a crime in the eyes of the law. And, as human society has the arbitrary power of assigning punishments to offences against itself, heavy or light, or of overlooking the offence altogether, or of remitting the penalty when imposed, so has the Church. And as the magistrate often inflicts a fine, under sanction of the law, instead of committing to prison, so does the Church allow of the commutation of her own punishments, which are called censures, into alms to the poor, into offerings for some religious object, or even into the mere paying the expenses of the process, that is, the cost of the suit. And as the connivance or free pardon of the magistrate is no pardon in the sight of Heaven of the adulterer or the burglar, nor is supposed to be such, so neither does the offender receive, nor is he promised, any forgiveness of his sin, either by the Church's taking off the censure (whether in consequence of an alms-giving or otherwise), or by her forbearing, which is the common case, to inflict censure altogether. It is true, the Church has the power of forgiving sins also, which I shall speak of directly; but this is by a different instrument, and by a totally different process, as every Catholic knows.

I repeat, the Catholic who perpetrates any great and public sin offends his Maker and offends his ecclesiastical society; the injury against his Maker is punished by an *ipso facto* separation from His favour; the injury against his society, when it is visited at all, is visited by excommunication or other spiritual infliction. The successor of St. Peter has the power committed to him of pardoning both offences, the offence against God and the offence against the Church; he is the ultimate source against all jurisdiction, whether external or internal, but he commonly restores such a sinner to the visible society of Christians, by an act of his own or of the metropolitan or ordinary, and he reconciles him to God by the agency of the priesthood. Repentance is required on the part of the offender for both restorations; but the *sin* is forgiven and its punishment remitted in one of them, viz., in the Sacrament of *Penance*, and in this Sacrament, in which is the only real pardon, no money is, or ever can be paid. The Sacrament cannot be bought; such an act would be a horrible crime; you know this, my Brothers, as I know it myself; we witness to each other that such is the received teaching among us. It is utterly false then to assert that it has ever been held in the Catholic Church that "the perpetration of crime could be indulged" for any sum of money. Neither for sins committed, nor sins to come, has money ever been taken as an equivalent, for one no more than the other. On the other hand, it is quite true that the injury done to the Church, when it happens to have been visited with a censure (which is not a common case), has certainly sometimes been compensated by the performance of some good work, and, in the number of such works, almsdeeds and religious offerings are included. I repeat, the Church has little dreams of forgiving the sinner by removing the censure and re-admitting him to public communion, as the magistrate by letting a culprit out of prison.

However, in spite of the broad and clear distinction I have been laying down, it is the Tradition of Protestantism, immutable and precise, as expressed in the words of its eminent Teacher and Doctor I have quoted, that the Catholic Church professes to forgive sins past and to-