



# CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. IV.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 1853.

NO. 5.

## PRESBYTERIANISM AND LIBERTY.

(From the Shepherd of the Valley.)

A parson in this city recently delivered a public discourse of some length, as Presbyterian parsons are free to do; not content with that, he published this discourse in the columns of the *Republican*—a privilege seldom permitted to Presbyterian parsons. The object of the discourse—which we read with delight—was two-fold; perhaps it was three-fold.—1st—to slander the Catholic Religion; 2nd—to show that the Presbyterian Sect is the light of the world; 3rd—to prove that the author of the sermon is the light of the Presbyterian Sect.

This sermon amused us. We intended that it should amuse our readers. These parsons are very dull fellows when they try to joke, but their serious efforts are very often exquisite and inimitable jests. So it was in this case. We put the discourse aside for review so carefully that for the present it is hidden even from ourselves. We are sorry for this, for we should have liked to have the preacher speak for himself. As it is, we must content ourselves with saying that the sermonizer praised his Sect as the peculiar friend and patron of learning and the fine arts, and the religious body to which, more than to any other, the people of these United States are indebted for the assertion and promulgation of those free and enlightened principles of government which have made this country—what it is. Popery was painted in very black colors, by way of contrast, and the writer, inventing some of his facts, and distorting others, succeeded in showing to his own satisfaction, no doubt, that Popery is at once the enemy of solid learning, the fine arts and rational freedom, both intellectual and political. Popery, however, has lived through other attacks of this sort, and is not entirely extinguished, though this sermon has been preached and published.

To declamation, we propose to oppose facts; such facts as occurred to us whilst reading the sermon and as, though perhaps not the most striking, are quite sufficient to topple down the airy castle which the preacher has amused himself by setting up.

The preacher unfortunately forgot the declaration of his own "Confession of Faith." He professes to be the advocate of unbounded Liberty of Conscience and Freedom of Speech; he believes that the people of the United States are indebted to Presbyterianism for the enjoyment and preservation of those blessings; he is opposed to the civil punishment of heresy, which he denounces as a peculiarly Popish practice; meanwhile, the Confession of Faith, to whose teachings he has pledged himself to confirm his own, and which his Sect sets forth as containing "the Sum of Saving Knowledge," says, Chap. xx., Art. iv.:

"For the publishing of such opinions, or maintaining of such practices, as are contrary to the light of nature, or to the known principles of Christianity, whether concerning faith, worship or conversation; or to the power of godliness; or such erroneous opinions or practices as, either in their own nature, or in the manner of publishing or maintaining them, are destructive to the eternal peace and order which Christ has established in the Church; they [the heretical and contumacious] may lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against by the censures of the Church, and by the power of the civil magistrature."

The Presbyterian Confession of Faith does, therefore, teach the civil punishment of spiritual crimes, and is, in this respect, in opposition with the spirit of the age; guilty of the very unpopular teaching charged upon Popery by the preacher, and in direct contradiction with the whole tenor of his discourse.

Calvin, the great founder of the heresy to which the preacher is addicted, was so far from identifying his new Gospel with Republicanism, that he taught in the 20th and last chapter of his book of the Institutions of the Christian Religion, (Sec. 21-29, edition of August, 1536) that Kings partake of the omnipotence of God. He says—*Reges a Deo imperium habere, et divinam potestatem in regibus residere*, that Kings have empire from God, and that a divine power resides in them. He proceeds from this to argue that it is a sacrilege to offend against kings. It is true that a change in the political circumstances of Mr. Calvin, led him to change his note before the next month was out. But the fact remains, that the great Reformer, when uninfluenced by a regard to his own temporal prosperity, laid down in his great theological text book, the doctrine of implicit obedience, and the unlawfulness of resistance in any case whatsoever, with as much clearness and force as he had at his command.

We pass, however, from the theory of the Puritans to their practice. Their early rule in this country in the day of their power, is known as one of the meanest and most detestable tyrannies on record.—

The spiritual descendants of men who made it a penal offence to eat mince pies at Christmas, and for a mother to kiss her child on the Sabbath day, and who decreed that those who refused to attend the conventicle on Sunday, should go to jail—as did the New England Puritans in the colony times, have little right to boast that the first fathers of their Superstition laid the corner stone of American Freedom.

The following sketch of the brief reign of Puritanism in England, is to our purpose. It will be found in the first volume of Macaulay's History of England. As Macaulay is a Protestant and a Liberal, his testimony is above suspicion:—

"The English Nonconformists became supreme in the State. No man could hope to rise to eminence and command but by their favor. Their favor was to be gained only by exchanging with them the signs and passwords of spiritual fraternity. One of the first resolutions adopted by Barebone's parliament, the most intensely Puritanical of all our political assemblies, was that no person should be admitted into the public service till the House should be satisfied of his real godliness. What were then considered as the signs of real godliness, the sad colored dress, the sour look, the straight hair, the nasal whine, the speech interspersed with quaint texts, the abhorrence of comedies, cards and hawking, were easily counterfeited by men to whom all religions were the same. The most notorious libertine who had fought under the royal standard might justly be thought virtuous when compared with some of those who, while they talked about sweet experiences and comfortable scriptures, lived in the constant practice of fraud, rapacity, and secret debauchery. The nation, with a rashness which we may justly regret, but at which we cannot wonder, formed its estimate of the whole party from these hypocrites. The theology, the manners, the dialect of the Puritan were thus associated in the public mind with the darkest and meanest vices. As soon as the Restoration had made it safe to avow enmity to the party which had so long been predominant in the state, a general outcry against Puritanism rose from every corner of the kingdom.

"The Puritans ought to have learned, if from nothing else, yet from their own discontents, from their own struggles, from their own victory, from the fall of that proud hierarchy by which they had been so heavily oppressed, that, in England, and in the seventeenth century, it was not in the power of the civil magistrate to drill the minds of men into conformity with his own system of theology. They proved, however, as intolerant and as meddling as ever Laud had been. They interdicted under heavy penalties, the use of the Book of Common Prayer, not only in churches, but even in private houses. It was a crime in a child to read by the bedside of a sick parent one of those beautiful collects which had soothed the griefs of forty generations of Christians. Severe punishments were denounced against such as should presume to blame the Calvinistic mode of worship. Clergymen of respectable character were not only ejected from their benefices by thousands, but were frequently exposed to the outrages of a fanatical rabble. Churches and sepulchres, fine works of art and curious remains of antiquity, were brutally defaced. The parliament resolved that all pictures in the royal collection which contained representations of Jesus or of the Virgin Mother should be burned. Sculpture fared as ill as painting.—Nymphs and Graces, the work of Ionian chisels, were delivered over to Puritan stone-masons to be made decent. Against the lighter vices the ruling faction waged war with a zeal little tempered by humanity or by common sense. Sharp laws were passed against betting. It was enacted that adultery should be punished with death. The illicit intercourse of the sexes, even where neither violence nor seduction was imputed, where no public scandal was given, where no conjugal right was violated, was made a misdemeanor. Public amusements from the masques which were exhibited at the mansions of the great down to the wrestling matches and the grinning matches on village greens, were vigorously attacked. One ordinance directed that all the May-poles in England should forthwith be hewn down. Another proscribed all theatrical diversions. The playhouses were to be dismantled, the spectators fined, the actors whipped at the cart's tail. Rope-dancing, puppet-shows, bowls, horse-racing, were regarded with no friendly eye. But bear-baiting, then a favorite diversion of high and low, was the abomination which most strongly stirred the wrath of the austere sectaries. It is to be remarked that their antipathy to this sport had nothing in common with the feeling which has, in our own time, caused the legislature to interfere for the purpose of protecting beasts against the wanton cruelty of men. The Puritan hated bear-baiting not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave

pleasure to the spectators. Indeed, he generally contrived to enjoy the double pleasure of tormenting both spectators and bear.

"Perhaps no single circumstance more strongly illustrates the temper of the precisians than their conduct respecting Christmas day. Christmas had been from time immemorial, the season of joy and domestic affection, a season when families assembled, when children came home from school, when quarrels were made up, when carols were heard in every street, when every house was decorated with evergreens, and every table was loaded with good cheer. At that season all hearts not utterly destitute of kindness were enlarged and softened. At that season the poor were admitted to partake largely of the overflowings of the wealth of the rich, whose bounty was peculiarly acceptable on account of the shortness of the days and of the severity of the weather. At that season the interval between landlord and tenant, master and servant, was less marked than through the rest of the year. Where there is much enjoyment there will be some excess; yet on the whole, the spirit in which the holiday was kept was not unworthy of a Christian festival. The Long Parliament gave orders, in 1664, that the twenty-fifth of December should be strictly observed as a fast, and that all men should pass it in humbly bemoaning the great national sin which they and their fathers had so often committed on that day by romping under the mistletoe, eating bear's head, and drinking ale flavored with roasted apples. No public act of that time seems to have irritated the common people more. On the next anniversary of the festival formidable riots broke out in many places. The constables were resisted, the magistrates insulted, the houses of noted zealots attacked, and the proscribed service of the day openly read in the churches.

"Such was the spirit of the extreme Puritans, both Presbyterian and Independent. Oliver, indeed, was little disposed to be either a persecutor or a meddler. But Oliver, the head of a party, and consequently, to a great extent, the slave of a party, could not govern altogether according to his own inclinations. Even under his administration many magistrates within their own jurisdiction made themselves as odious as Sir Hudibras, interfered with all the pleasures of the neighborhood, dispersed festive meetings, and put fiddlers in the stocks. Still more formidable was the zeal of the soldiers. In every village where they appeared there was an end of dancing, bell-ringing, and hockey. In London they several times interrupted theatrical performances, at which the Protector had the judgment and good nature to connive."

So much for the Puritans as patrons of the arts,—

as the advocates and originators of freedom of speech and of opinion. England was not named "Merry England" under Puritan rule.

Puritanism the Author and Preserver of Religious Freedom! What next? Let us finish our desultory remarks, by a sketch of the life of the Father of the Puritans, and the history of the city in which his detested system first saw day.

When God determined to punish the disorders of Geneva, He sent there his messenger of wrath. He came in the shape of a small, thin, swarthy man of thirty years of age. The lust of dominion shone from his restless eyes and sounded in the harsh tones of his uneven voice. Already disgraced in twenty different localities, he sought a refuge amongst the inhabitants of Geneva, bringing with him all those reasons for hating the human race which every detected villain has. Cold, proud, vindictive, cunning, active, laborious, possessing learning enough to seduce, and vanity enough to give him confidence in his own powers, he burned with an absolute thirst for power, which preserved him perhaps from sensual excesses. He felt no want of riches or pleasures. The vices of other men would have relieved their characters and looked like virtues when contrasted with the gloomy malice of John Calvin. His mission was to punish, and God permitted him to establish a power longer in duration and more terrible in effect, than that of any conquering tyrant. Calvin became Chief Priest of Geneva in matters of Religion, and Dictator in temporal affairs. Nothing was done without his advice; nothing was attempted until he issued his command. The French heretics,—the villains whom Francois I. had kicked out of France too late,—maintained Calvin's power and experienced his protection. They and he became between them masters of the place. The inhabitants of Geneva found that their revolt and apostasy had done little towards procuring them freedom and independence. King Stork was worse than King Log.

Calvin composed what he called his Theology, a revival, for the most part, of the old follies of the Vaudois; these errors passed as the newest, as they were the most anti-Christian, which had so far been preached; many accepted them; besides it was not well to resist. Freedom of opinion was exercised in

Geneva at the risk of life. Calvin burned any opponents whom he could reach, and gave vent in his writings to his impotent malice against such as were beyond his power.

Calvin established in Geneva an unexampled tyranny. He endeavored, according to his disposition to compensate by the rigor of the punishments which he ordained, for the utter want of all moral principle in his blasphemous system. He seemed to amuse himself by tormenting criminals, not for the sake of reform or example, but to enjoy the delight of inflicting torture. Imprisonment, iron-collars, scourging, death, were brought into play on every occasion. Vice was persecuted, not punished. The fear of punishment was the only check upon crime in the Puritan city, and a lying external rigidity concealed, as it always must in such cases, a frightful internal corruption. Calvin never forgave those who offended him, or opposed his opinions. Epiphanius was beheaded,—Gruet was punished in the same way:—they had ventured to write against the Reformer. A poor artisan who dabbled in Theology, was compelled to beg pardon on his knees for having ventured on the utterance of the atrocious sentiments, that Calvin had been mistaken on a certain point, and ought not to be ashamed to retract, as St. Augustine had done on a similar occasion. Servetus, a half-crazy Spanish physician, had sustained a controversy with Calvin in the style of the times. Calvin enticed him to Geneva, accused him of heresy, put him on his trial without allowing him an advocate, and had him condemned. Servetus was fastened upright to a post fixed in the ground; a chain of iron surrounded his body, four or five pieces of thick rope bound back his neck. His book was fastened at his side and a crown of straw steeped in sulphur placed on his head. The executioner, whom he begged to shorten his tortures kindled the flames before him, and then slowly surrounded him with a circle of fire. At this sight the poor wretch uttered a cry so terrible that all present were struck with horror. After half an hour of torment, Servetus shrieked out, "Jesus, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me!" and yielded up his soul. Calvin, afraid that the unhappy lunatic might pass for a martyr, at once set to work to revile him; he wrote "That those wretches who were moved at the sight of his punishment, may not boast of the obstinacy of this man as of the constancy of a martyr, I declare that he showed, from the time of his arrest to the moment of his death, a brutal stupidity; sometimes he remained in the attitude of an idiot, sometimes he uttered deep sighs, at other times furious shrieks, and then he bellowed for mercy like an ox." Talk of Shylock and Iago—the imagination of the poet failed to reach the reality, which cursed the earth in the person of John Calvin.

Calvin died in 1564; but God who visits the sins of the fathers upon their children for generations, did not allow his work to perish with him. The Genevese having no more "dissenters" to burn, took to roasting witches, a brutality for which Europe has to thank the Reformation, and of which very few examples are to be found in the barbarous ages before that event. They burnt a hundred and fifty of them in the Puritan city in the space of sixty years. The last date in 1552, but in 1667 the Genevese Puritans roasted a poor mad-man who had become a Jew. These Apostles and Precursors, nay, inventors, of Freedom in Geneva, played many other free and enlightened tricks too numerous to recount.—Amongst other liberal enactments of their time of domination, we notice that which forbade that any one should teach Mathematics to a Savoyard; they prohibited any one from wearing lace and drapery; they made it a penal offence to go out in a coach, to wear slippers, to eat sugar plums at a ball—in short, the parsons put down by penal enactments all innocent amusements, and to their eternal honor be it recorded, that when a great pestilence attended their city, these austere Apostles refused to visit the hospitals, and begged the Council to pardon their weakness, as God had not vouchsafed them courage to face such danger. The Registers of the Council contain to this day the petition of the Pastors, and many a proof of the order which prevailed in a flock watched over by such zealous Shepherds. The history of Geneva, the Rome of Protestantism, has been for three centuries a history of stupid bigotry, unexampled intolerance and cruelty, mean tyranny, and, at last, open unblushing infidelity. It was hardly a descent to go from Calvin to Rousseau,—Rousseau, whose nativity is still celebrated at Geneva, as a Protestant double of the first class,—Rousseau, the thief, the liar, the coward, the shameless autobiographer who has left to the world the history of impurities of which ordinary profligates would not dare to speak, is now worshipped at Geneva, because his works are full of venomous attacks upon the Religion of Jesus Christ.

We must stop here. We have said enough. The