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FIRST LETTER OF THE REV. JAMES MAHER, OF CARLOW, ON "BIBLE-READING."

TO CLAYTON BROWNE, ESQ.

Sir—Permit me respectfully to call your attention, and, through you, the attention of the Magistracy of Carlow, to an intolerable nuisance amongst us which ought to be abated.

Last August, Sir Benjamin Hall, Chief Commissioner, suppressed Bible reading and preaching in the royal parks of London. This practice, as it is now understood, consists in denouncing, with Bible in hand, some or all the doctrines of Christianity in such language as is most likely to wound the religious feelings of believers. Her Majesty's Commissioners dealt with the offence in a summary way amid the indignant reclamations of all the Bibles. The Press in the interest of that party raised a great clamor, but the work was done. It would be well, indeed, if the evil, which exists in this country to a far greater extent, was met with the same cool determined spirit.

Sir, it is not necessary to inform you of the existence of this monster evil amongst us. The Bible-readers are in all our towns and villages; they constitute a large body of ignorant, uneducated, and characterless men. Who they are, or who sent them, or where they come from, what are their antecedents, what doctrines they hold, what creed they profess, nobody knows nor cares. They are generally hired at very low wages—a shilling or two a day—and their business is to go through their district, assailing, in season and out of season, Catholics and Catholicity. They set to work during the day principally in the outskirts and back lanes of towns where poverty and distress press most heavily on the people, and in the evening they prepare the reports of the progress they have made, which they forward weekly or monthly to their paymasters. They manage not unfrequently to get up a Biblical riot; they irritate the people almost beyond endurance; they bore them, designate them "idolaters," and from angry words the parties sometimes come to blows. The result is always gratifying to the Bible-readers, as affording important matters for their report, proving also that they suffer persecution for justice sake, and therefore highly deserve their pay.

In this last sketch, I think, Sir, you will admit that the character and motives of these men, judging from their public acts as they come before us, are in no wise misrepresented. They cannot possibly do any good: they generally do great harm; they create bickerings, dissensions, and all manner of uncharitableness. They ought, therefore, to be discountenanced by the Magistracy, or summarily put down as they have been in London. It is said, and, perhaps, believed, that they make converts. No, Sir, not one; and if you permit me, I shall show you most satisfactorily, in a plain uncontroverted way, the impossibility of such a result. The subject is to me as clear as that two and two make four; and I think I can, if you do me the honor to read this letter, communicate to your fair and unprejudiced mind my convictions. Bible-readers can make no converts, simply because Protestantism, when fairly and fully examined, has nothing in it, as a religion, to induce Catholics to accept it.

First—Protestantism, or the Protestant religion, has evidently suffered to fall into disuse all the sacraments, the fountains whence we draw the waters of salvation. The grace of regeneration in Baptism is denied by the majority of the clergy, or, at most, it is left an open question. The great sacrament of Confirmation, conferred solely by episcopal hands, it considers as a venerable ceremony—nothing more. It has closed the sacred tribunal of Penance, where sin, thro' the blood of the Redeemer, is remitted. The anointing of the sick it has long since laid aside as useless and dangerous, especially in infectious diseases, notwithstanding the testimony of St. James in its favor (chap. v., verse 14.)

Orders and Matrimony in the Protestant ritual, are no longer sacraments. They confer no peculiar grace. The former is simply an appointment to a spiritual dignity, like the appointments to secular offices, by letters patent from the Queen. The latter is a civil contract—nothing more, before the Parish registrar. The presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, under the Sacramental Veils, it ignores. His being in the midst of us, declared by himself to be his delight, was felt by Protestantism to be simply an inconvenience. It cannot realize what it is to have the Blessed Sacrament, and to believe in it and love, as Catholics believe and love. The daily sacrifice—the renewal and commemoration of that on Calvary—it has given up;—hence the church doors are closed from Sunday to Sunday; and even then, how few attend, because they can read their Bible and pray at home, and nothing more is done at Church. With angels or saints Protestantism holds no communion. It has nothing of loving reverence or affection for the ever Blessed Virgin Mary. Although she is the

woman clothed with the sun, with the moon beneath her feet, it fears to do her homage. It hesitates to give her the glorious title of *Deipara*. It is angry with us for making so much of them. We do them, in Protestant opinion, too much honor. Even the Cross, the sign of the Son of Man, finds little favor in its eyes. In one word, Protestantism having, in its ritual, left out whatever of holiness, of grace, of heavenly gifts, whatever unites us closely with God, and brings us nearer to the Saviour; having left all these things out, it calls what remains by the appropriate, but unsatisfactory name of Protestantism. It creates a great void. The tabernacle is deserted. The Holy of Holies is not there. The Victim of Calvary is gone. Some scraps of doctrine, it is true, from the Old Church, are still retained; but the great Mysteries, the Sacraments and the Sacrifice are done away with. The Church is reduced to the condition of an assembly room or prayer hall—all its sanctity disappears—it is laid spiritually desolate, and this very desolation in the holy places is properly called Protestantism. These truths, although stated inoffensively, are disagreeable to some, and the more disagreeable because they are simply the truth, and cannot be denied. Is there any sophistry, any rhetorical artifice and misrepresentation in this simple statement? Protestantism is, I freely admit, a respectable, gentlemanly sort of religion, made and ordered by the State for the comfort and convenience of the higher classes. The head of the State—the King or Queen, as the case may be—being always, of course, head of the religion. It has dispensed with fasting, mortification, clerical celibacy, and all monastic and religious vows; and to put matters on a still more comfortable footing, you are, Sir, at liberty to believe just as much as you please, and nothing more. The faith of others, be they Bishops or Archbishops, nowise influences your belief. In a word, Sir, it is a form of worship without Sacraments, without Sacrifice, without Graces or a Priesthood; but it has state-appointed Dignitaries, nobly endowed with rich benefices and enormous episcopal incomes. This is not, I trust, stating the case unfairly. What, then, I respectfully ask, has Protestantism, as a religion, to offer, which Catholics can accept. To profess Protestantism, as it appears to us, would be to give up the religion we have—rich in grace and spiritual power, and to live without any. We cannot consent to do this. If you ask us to give up the Holy Sacraments and dread Sacrifice once offered on Calvary, and now renewed daily on our altars—the great pledge of God's eternal love for man, you ought to offer something heavenly in its place—something besides the mere negation or rejection of Catholic doctrines, which is properly enough signified by the term Protestantism. A Catholic may, for some temporal advantage, to improve, for example, his chance of obtaining some of those minor situations in the gift of the gentry, go to the Established Church on Sunday, or he may give up Christianity altogether; but he never can become a believer in Protestantism, for this simple reason that there is nothing in it, no dogmas, no fixed creed, no Sacraments to believe in. This opinion was held by Dr. Johnson, one of the greatest scholars that Protestantism has to boast of. He says:—

"A man who is converted from Protestantism to Popery may be sincere. He parts with nothing; he is only superadding to what he already had. But, to convert from Popery to Protestantism, a man gives up so much of what he has held as sacred as anything he retains; there is such a laceration of mind, in such a conversation, that it can hardly be sincere or lasting."

The Doctor saw the matter, precisely in the light in which we view it, and had the courage and honesty to state the truth openly.

Protestantism, so far from having power to gain over Catholics, cannot even retain those who were brought up in its communion. It has no hold, never had any, on the masses of the people; what is their condition in England, where Protestantism has had things all its own way for three centuries? Every account, whether from Parliament, or the Episcopate, concurs, in stating, that the artizan and working classes have given up religion altogether, and live without a God in the world. Her Majesty's Commissioners, in their report on the last census, have made awful revelations on that subject; they announce, page 97, "that myriads of our laboring population are really as ignorant of Christianity as were the Heathen Saxons at Augustine's landing." If a gentleman will go, says the *Times*, January 1854, to his church he will discover that the working people are not there. "If he goes to the next parish church, and the nearest chapel of ease, and the proprietary chapels about him, and the dissenting chapels, and to every place where God is worshipped in any manner whatsoever, he will still find the working classes not there." All this comes of Protestantism. It evidently cannot retain, or win back the poor, but the most striking evidence of its insufficiency to satisfy the inquiring mind is the great fact that it has been

unable to retain its most distinguished scholars, who have lately left it: men of the first order of mind, of deep research, distinguished amongst their fellows in every walk of science, to whom the succession to the richest benefices in the world was no distant prospect. They have been nursed in the lap of Protestantism—instructed in all its traditions—they have studied its philosophy—mastered its theology—and knew its history. They walked within its sanctuary: obtained distinction in its pulpits and the halls of the universities. They were second to none in the various departments of science and literature; they partook of the good things which Protestantism had to bestow; they were bound to it by a thousand ties, enjoyed its dignities, obtained position and wealth in its high places; why did they not remain? Simply because they knew, and who could know better, that Protestantism had none of the aids, the heavenly gifts, the spiritual consolations which the Christian souls feels its wants. It has learning, refinement, cultivated taste, wealth in abundance, elegance of manners, but it wants the sacraments and sacrifice—the characteristics of religion—which brings to the souls the merits of the Saviour, the all-sanctifying blood of Calvary.

Can it, then, be reasonably hoped that Catholics will take up Protestantism as a religion (they may, one or other, embrace it as a means of saving themselves and families from the pangs of hunger) when they see that the people, born and baptized in that communion, have in millions abandoned it, and that the most learned and virtuous of its Doctors and Divines, after much prayer and diligent search, have renounced it, and all its advantages for ever. As well might you expect to see the strange phenomenon in nature of the sun withholding its light, or the stream flowing back to its source. Catholics have reason to know Protestantism well. It never came to our doors as a blessing; it came to insult, declaring us, on oath, who adore alone the one eternal living God, to be "idolaters." It never brought us anything but sorrow, and never left us without taking the fruits of our labor, for which it made us no return. It inflicted upon us the Penal Code, which Dr. Johnson describes as exceeding in cruelty, intensity, and duration, the early persecutions of Christianity. It seized upon, and retains the provision of the poor, and the revenues destined for those who ministered to them in religion, although the people have ever rejected its ministrations, holding with fidelity to the faith of their fathers. Catholics know very well that every heresy, every error in religion, is tolerated within its bosom by Protestantism. No form of opinion, save the ancient faith, comes amiss; it stands well with Arianism, Sabellianism, with those who deny the Divinity of Christ—the Trinity of Persons. Even some of its Bishops reject these dogmas, and still retain high places; but it never ceases to hate, to oppose the ancient Church whose income it enjoys. For that it came into the world, for that it continues to exist; and whenever it succeeds in any country in trampling out Catholicity, it falls at once into infidelity. Opposition to, and hatred of the Catholic religion, being the breath of its nostrils. The *Times*, May, 1856, represents the friends of Protestantism, when its endowments came last under discussion, in the House of Commons, on Mr. Miall's motion, as hanging back from its defence. "Nobody," says this journal, "could speak an affectionate or enthusiastic word for it. There was nothing in its history to appeal to—no great work to point to. Nobody could say that it had diminished Romanism, or done any remarkable service of any kind. Everybody felt, in short, that the Irish Establishment was an anomaly in theory, as representing so small a part of the population, and had been a feeble and ineffective, and a corrupt institution in practice."

If Protestants can remain with a safe conscience in this institution, be it so. It is their own affair, but to ask Catholics to join it, is infatuation. We cannot unless we give up all idea of religion. Having, I trust, convinced you of this important truth, have I not a right to call upon you, and the magistracy of Carlow, to discountenance the fraternity of Proselytizers, who disturb our peace, and tease and insult in a thousand ways our people? The religion of Sir Thomas More, a Fenelon, a St. Francis Xavier, a St. Vincent de Paul, in a word, of all the Saints in the calendar, and of one hundred thousand living Sisters of Mercy and Charity besides, as devoted to the duties of relieving suffering humanity, as Miss Florence Nightingale—so eulogised and celebrated solely because she shines almost alone (purely and brightly I admit), in the firmament of Protestantism; such a religion, I say, ought to be spared the vulgar gibes and coarse abuses of hired ignorance and unscrupulous slander. The employment of such agency is infinitely discreditably to the Protestant ministry. Well may friends denounce it "as a corrupt institution in practice."

Wishing you, Sir, many happy returns of this holy season, I have the honor to be, your's truly, Carlow, Dec. 31, 1856. JAMES MAHER.

P. S.—Next week I shall invite your attention to the discreditable system of proselytism attempted in Graigue, under the auspices of the Rev. Dawson Massey. The arts employed for that purpose will, I think, surprise the public.

The January number of the *Dublin Review* contains a very interesting article on "The Irish in England," which is generally attributed to His Eminence, the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster. We think our readers, to whom the *Review* is perhaps not generally accessible, will thank us for transferring it, or the greater part thereof, to our columns:—

"Among the different races of which the vast population of England is composed, there is one which presents to any ordinary observer the most evident and indubitable marks of a complete isolation from the rest. Although legally united under the same form of government, entitled to the same privileges, and subjected to the same political burdens, the Irish are still as truly 'aliens' in race, in religion, and in feeling, from the great mass of the British nation, as they were three hundred years ago. A settlement of Irish existed from time immemorial in London and elsewhere; but the influx from Ireland has immensely increased during the last fifty or sixty years. Long before the famine of 1846, they had dispersed themselves in large bodies over the country, searching for employment and the means of subsistence. The misery, the poverty, and the want which they had to endure at home; the hope of bettering their condition on the more favored soil of Britain; the demand for labor in the large mercantile and manufacturing cities, the attraction of the harvest and the hop gathering, the migratory spirit itself of the people, all these have been the causes of their surprising immigration into England. At present they form a large and an increasing portion of the lower population of the country. They are to be found almost everywhere throughout the length and breadth of the land. We can form some idea of the vast multitudes of Irish in England, by bearing in mind that of the Catholic population of the country, which is every day swelling its numbers, the overwhelming majority are natives of Ireland.—It was the complaint of the Roman satirist, that go where he would he was sure to meet with a hungry Greek.

Græculus esurivus in cœlum, jussuris, ibit.

"And we can well imagine a sturdy and phlegmatic Saxon giving wrathful utterance to a similar lamentation with respect to the Irish. You meet them on the highways 'tramping' the country, with a patience and a diligence worthy of a more profitable occupation. In the streets of London you encounter light-hearted and happy looking Irish boys, and you cannot but wonder at the strange destiny which has transplanted them from the rural scenes, and the holy wells, and the green fields, and the purple mountains of their native land into the midst of the busy Babylon of the world. The poor girls, who eke out a scanty subsistence by the sale of flowers, are, many of them, natives of Ireland. The stout hodder or bricklayer's laborer has probably come from the county of Cork. The Irish have invaded the ancient trade of the English costermonger, usurped his rights, and carried off a portion of his profits. They are in the arsenal at Woolwich, in the factories of Norwich and Kent, in the farm houses of Essex and Sussex, in the market gardens near London, in the police and the army, and among those valiant sailors who guard our coasts from smugglers and the French. It is some destitute and friendless Irish girl, aged from sixteen to twenty years, who is maid of all work to the humblest class of London shopkeepers, as well as to that low grade of Jewish householders who inhabit the unaristocratic neighborhood of Spitalfields. In a word, the lower class of Irish are to the rest of the population of England what the Hebrews were to the Egyptians; with this material difference, that whereas the latter inhabited the most favored part of Egypt, and ate the fatness of the land, the Irish are congregated together in the poorest, and the most squalid, the most neglected, and the most destitute corners of our cities, while their food is very often the crumbs which fall from the rich man's table." Or more properly, they are to the English what the Gabaonites were to the Israelites in Canaan; that is to say, they have become, by cruel misfortune, and by hard necessity, 'hewers of wood and drawers of water' to the proud Anglo-Saxon race.

"The Irish street-sellers, I am informed, buy two-thirds of all the refuse, the other third being purchased by the lower class of English costermongers,—the 'illegitimates'—as they are called. We must not consider the sale of the damaged fruit so great an evil as it would, at the first blush, appear, for it constitutes perhaps the sole luxury of poor children, as well as of the poor themselves, who, were it not for the half-penny and farthing lots of the refuse-sellers, would doubtless never know the taste of such things.—*London Labor*, vol. i. p. 118.

"It is this people, thus scattered throughout the land, and increasing every day in numbers and in importance, although occupying at present the lowest position in the scale of national estimation, which constitute the immediate and pressing charge of the Church. They are her children, and whatever be their faults or their shortcomings in other respects, at all events they cannot be accused of unfaithfulness to the profession of the Catholic faith. To the Church they have been steadfast, through good report and through evil report; and she has now to take them by the hand, to draw out, and to cultivate the good seed which her sacraments have planted in their souls; to educate them as well socially as religiously, and by means of them, and through them, to impress herself gradually, and favorably, upon the nation at large. It is, therefore, of the first moment, that all who are interested in the extension of the Catholic Church in England, should devote their very best efforts towards bringing into shape, and order, and discipline, that vast body of Catholics which is comprised within the Irish poor. But, in order to do this with profit, and with effect, we must understand those whom we would wish to influence and to train. The Irish poor form a study by themselves. They have their own modes of thought, their own national character, their own ways of giving expression to their religious feelings, their own habits and their own prejudices. To deal with them to any purpose, we must be able both to understand their national character and their national peculiarities, and to some extent at least, be pre-disposed to sympathize with their feelings. We confess that whenever we discover in those who have had opportunities of becoming acquainted with them, an inaptitude to understand the Irish poor, and an incapability of appreciating them, we are always tempted to attribute it to one or other of these causes. It may proceed from the absence of that Catholic instinct which no mere education can bestow. Or it may be the result of a certain stiffness and severity of tone, which is to some extent common to the Catholics, no less than to the Protestants, of England; or it may be the effect of a refinement which almost amounts to a disease, which is fastidiously intolerant of all that does not correspond with its own peculiar type of religious propriety, and which is as little at its ease in the churches of Rome or Naples, as in dealing with the poor of Ireland. In addition to their other difficulties, the Irish in this country, as in America, have to contend with a prejudice universal against them. It is useless to deny the existence of such a prejudice, and it would be unfair and untrue to assert that it is founded upon the difference of religion alone. The Catholicity of the Irish, no doubt, magnifies and increases this national prejudice against them; but the prejudice itself existed when the two people were Catholic. It is a prejudice of race, not of religion, and it has its foundation in a natural difference of temperament, character, and disposition. But its effect with those who come in contact with the Irish is too frequently to render them incapable of producing any useful impression upon that people, because, incapable of putting themselves into the position of so different a race, unravelling their modes of thought, and seeing things from their own point of view.—Thus they become to each other like men who are speaking in unknown tongues. Each party fails in his attempts to make the other comprehend his meaning, and each departs more and more strengthened and confirmed in his hereditary prejudices—the Irish longing for those who will be able to understand him, and the English more strongly convinced than ever that all Irishmen are impracticable—are in fact nothing better than rogues, vagabonds, and liars.

"We shall not, we trust, be considered presumptuous, if we confess that it is our desire in the present article to set the character of the Irish poor in its true light before our readers.—We have no object to serve except the cause of truth, and justice, and charity. We acknowledge to entertain a genuine appreciation and admiration of the real Irish poor, especially as they are to be seen in their own country; but we are not going to be carried away by any mere sentiment of a natural liking. We shall state, with fairness and with candor, all that we honestly believe to be said for, and all that is to be said against, the Irish in England. We shall not hide the good, nor shall we disown the bad. We shall endeavor to describe them to the best of our power, as they really are. And whatever conclusions we shall draw with respect to their claims upon our sympathy, and to their capabilities of improvement, shall be founded upon the actual character and condition of the people, such as we conscientiously believe, and shall show it to be.

"I. Although the large masses of Irish which are to be met with in the great towns of England, are considered even by the lower classes of the English population to occupy a still lower grade in the social system than themselves, yet it can be shown by the most indisputable testi-